Chapter - 4

GOTHICISM IN EDGAR ALLAN POE’S SHORT STORIES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories are known for their Gothicism. The major kinds of his stories in this regard are Detective stories, Horror stories, and Romantic and Comic stories. These categories of his stories are discussed in the following pages.

4.1 GOTHICISM IN POE’S DETECTIVE STORIES:

Detective fiction presents a mysterious event of crime, usually but not necessary murder, at first concealing the solution from the reader but finally revealing it through the successful investigation. The historians of the form have tried to trace its origin to the puzzle tales of the enlightenment or the Bible but there is a general agreement that its real history starts in the 19th century. Poe brought all the basic ingredients of it together in his ‘tales of ratiocination’ of the 1840s. His detective, the brilliant and eccentric Mr. Dupin, is accompanied by an obligingly imperceptive friend who narrates the story. Crime fiction is the genre of fiction that deals with crimes, their detection, criminals and their motives. It has several sub-genres, including detective fiction, legal thriller, courtroom drama and hard boiled fiction. Crime fiction is a typically 19th and 20th century genre dominated by British and American writers.

The archetype for a murder mystery dates back to ‘The Three Apples’ in the One Thousand and One Nights. Crime fiction began to be considered as a serious genre only around 1900. The earliest known crime novel is The
Rector of Veilbye (1829) by the Danish author Steen Blichers. Yet more known are the earlier dark detective works of Poe. Such as ‘The Murder in the Rue Morgue,’ ‘The Mystery of Marie Roget’ and ‘The Purloined Letter.’ Wilkie Collin’s epistolary novel The Woman in White was published in 1860, while his novel The Moonstone (1868) is often thought to be his masterpiece. French author Emile Gaboriau’s Monsieur Lecog (1868), laid the ground work for the methodical, scientifically minded detective. The evolution of ‘locked room’ mysteries was one of the landmarks in the history of crime fiction. The forerunner of today’s crime fiction includes the ghost story, the horror story and the revenge story.

Detective fiction is a branch of crime fiction that centers upon the investigation of crime, usually murder by a detective either professional or amateur. Detective fiction is the most popular form of fiction. A common feature of detective fiction is an investigator, who is unmarried with some source of income other than a regular job and who generally has some pleasing eccentricities. The traditional formula for the detective story starts with a seemingly irresolvable mystery. Poe is credited with the invention of the short tale of detection as a literary form and with the creation of the abstract, analytical reasoner which subsequently became the model for such detectives as Sherlock Holmes and Solar Pons. His first exercise in this manner was ‘Maelzel’s Chess-Player’ in which he demonstrated by a process of methodical reasoning that an automaton chess player then traveling round American cities was in reality operated by a concealed man. This attracted widespread attention at the time and foreshadowed the method.
Poe is credited as being an originator in the genre of detective fiction with his three stories about C. Auguste Dupin, the most famous of which is ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue.’ Poe wrote a satirical detective story ‘Thou Art the Man.’ There is no doubt that he inspired mystery writers who came after him, particularly Arthur Conan Doyle in his series of stories featuring Sherlock Holmes. Each Poe’s detective story is an origin from which a whole literature has developed where the detective story was until Poe breathed of life into it. Poe however can be taken as the founder of detective fiction. Jacques Barzun has observed that it was Poe who first took the,

…entrancing idea of detection and made it breed a distinctive literature by displaying it in an appropriate form…”The Murders in The Rue Morgue,” published in 1841, put an end to the episodic and casual use of detective fiction. And when four years later Poe had written three other detective tales, all the elements of the genre were at hand. What was to follow could only be elaboration, embellishment and complication most of it agreeable some of it transcending the first creation.¹

A rationative or detective tale can be defined as a story characterized by a process of reasoning. A. E. Murch explains the detective story as “a tale in which the primary interest lies in the methodical discovery by rational means of the exact circumstances of a mysterious event or series of events.”² The elements of curiosity is the focal point in a rationative tale. Poe criticized Eugene Sue for the lack of this very element. Poe says Sue exhibits:
….total want of arselare artem. In effect the writer is always saying to the reader, “Now in one moment- you shall see what you shall see. I am about to produce on you a remarkable impression. Prepare to have your imagination or your pity greatly excited.” The wires are not only not concealed, but displayed as things to be admired, equally with the puppets they set in motion.³

In a rationative tale Poe thinks every point is so arranged as to perplex the reader and to whet his desire for elucidation. Once the design of mystery has been determined, it becomes imperative.

…first that no undue or inartistical means be employed to conceal the secret of the plot; and secondly that the secret be well kept…A failure to preserve it until the proper moment of denouement throws all into confusion. If the mystery leaks out, against the author’s will his purposes are immediately at odds and ends: for he proceeds upon the supposition that certain impressions do exist which do not exist in the minds of his readers.”⁴

Vincent Buranelli enumerated three elements necessary for the success of a rationative tale. The crime is a moving force there. If, there is no crime worth unraveling the second element does not become operative. The third element is a corollary of the second. On the method of detection depends the success of the tale. It is not the ‘launch’ that matters, analysis must be provided. The solution of the
mystery can be brought about by the identification of the reasoner’s intellect with that of his opponent.

The solution of the mystery depends on the exact admeasurements of the other man’s mental processes. This admeasurement is to be made in terms of analysis. The mystery is not to be solved by the powers of intuition. In intuition, one can put forward no criteria which can lead to the final unraveling of the mystery: there is no step by step progression toward the final conclusion. These rationative tales demonstrate Poe’s extraordinary analytical ability. Poe compares analytical ability to physical prowess:

As the strong man exults in his physical ability delighting in such exercises as call his muscles into action, so glories the analyst in that moral activity which disentangle. He derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations bringing his talent into play. He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of acumen which appears to the ordinary apprehension preternatural. His results brought about by the very soul and essence of method, have, in truth the whole air of intuition.5

The disentangling power is found in abundance in the detective who steps in to solve the mystery. His name is legion: Sherlock Holmes, Philo Vance, Charlie Chan, Father Brown, Ellery Queen, Perry Mason, Inspector Maigret, Hercule Poirot and others. These are all aliases. His real name is C. Auguste Dupin who was created by Poe. The name C. Auguste Dupin has sent many a researcher guessing. W. T. Bandy in an interesting article has tried to bring all major theories regarding the name of Poe’s detective. Poe,
imagining his hero combined three elements which had already developed in his earlier work.

Firstly, Poe enjoyed displaying his ingenuity at solving puzzles of the most extraordinary kind. He solved the mystery of the Maelzel’s chess player. Secondly, in his criticism Poe’s detective ferrets out plagiarisms, and hunts down writers guilty of bad taste, confused thinking or the murder of the language. Like Poe the critic Dupin holds in contumely the public wisdom and the popular taste of his time and, thirdly, Poe, in his Gothic tales created an Usher-like hero who is a decadent aristocrat. Dupin is depicted as a ‘Gentleman’ of an illustrious family, although reduced in circumstances. About Dupin Poe says:

This young gentleman was of an excellent, indeed of an illustrious family, but by a variety of untoward events, had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it, and he ceased to bestir himself in the world, or care for the retrieval of his fortunes…Books, indeed were his sole luxuries and in Paris these are easily obtained."^6

Dupin has the dual temperament combining the analytical ability of a mathematician with an intuition.

The first detective story ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ pioneered the sub-genre of the ‘locked room’ mystery by presenting a seemingly impossible crime with a surprising solution. The second story ‘The Mystery of Marie Roget’ is interesting both historically and structurally. Because it is based upon the real New York murder case of Mary Rogers; structurally because the narrative’s use of newspaper reports and textual sources
anticipates the kind of fragmentary structure that would be used by Wilkie Collins. ‘The Purloined Letter’ has become significant in terms of psychoanalytic theory following Jacques Lacan’s analyses of the story. The stories are significant for introducing us to the figure of the detective in Dupin. Dupin would be a template for many of the detectives to appear in the late 19th century mystery.

C. August Dupin is a man in Paris, who solves the mysterious brutal murder of two women. Numerous witnesses heard a suspect though no one agreed on what language was spoken. In a letter to friend Dr. Joseph Snodgrass, Poe said of ‘Murders in the Rue Morgue,’ “Its theme was the exercise of ingenuity in the detecting of a murderer.” Dupin is not a professional detective. He decides to investigate the murder in the Rue Morgue for his personal amusement. He has a desire for truth and to prove a falsely accused man as innocent. His interests are not financial and he even declines a monetary reward from the owner of the orangutan. The revelation of the actual murderer removes the crime as neither the orangutan or its owner can be held responsible. ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ established many tropes that would become common elements in mystery fiction: the eccentric but brilliant detective, the bumbling constabulary, the first person narration. Poe portrays the police in an unsympathetic manner. He initiates the story telling device where the detective announces his solution and then explains the reasoning leading upto it. It is a first locked room mystery in the detective fiction.

Poe invented the term “The Tale of Ratiocination.” The Ratiocination however is not just for the detective. He does not allow the reader to sit back and merely observe; the process of ratiocination which he set up is intended
for the reader, as well as for the detective. In fact, the story becomes one in which the reader must accompany the detective towards the solution and apply his own powers of logic and deduction alongside those of the detective. This idea becomes very important in all subsequent works of detective fiction. That is, in all such fiction, all clues are available for the reader, as well as the detective, to solve the crime. ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ was the first tale of ratiocination. It introduces more basic features of detective fiction than any of Poe’s other stories. Among these basic features are three central ideas: the murder occurs in a locked room from which there is no apparent egress. In later detective fiction, this idea is expanded and is used when the author sets the scene of the murder in a closed environment. Frequently in detective fiction, the amateur detective is drawn into the case because a friend has been falsely accused. M. Dupin is drawn into the case because of an obligation to the accused; the detective uses some sort of unexpected means to produce the solution. We have noted above that all of the clues should be present but, nevertheless, the appeal of detective fiction lies in the unexpected solution which becomes logical only in retrospect.

Two aphorisms concerning detective fiction are presented for the first time in this story. The truth is what remains after the impossible has been determined no matter how improbable that truth may seem. That is the police determine that there was no possible egress from the room of the murdered women. The door was locked from within, and all the windows were securely locked. Secondly, the case can be solved by the key detective. For example, the problem in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ how can a non-rational, inhuman being break through the bounds of law, custom and
civilized order and commit such a gruesome atrocity on two well-protected women? The police cannot bring themselves to conclude that a human could possibly do this. The murders can only be solved, logically, when a person is able to place his human mind into conformity with a non-human mind and with the irrational acts of a beast.

The title of the story is straightforward. In the opening section, Poe offers some of the views expressed above about the need of the detective to be observed. The most casual movement can often reveal more than the magnifying glass which Dupin never uses, even though the police constantly rely on one to help them solve crimes. And also too, the superlative detective must be able to make the proper inferences from the things he observes. Here the ingenuity becomes the most important aspect in solving a crime.

In conclusion Mr. Dupin is actually a representative of a man who has a pure poetic intuition bordering on omniscience. He virtually ‘dreams’ his solutions. His logical method is to identify his own intellect with that of another and thereby divine what another person must think. In the first part of the story, Dupin can so completely identify with the thoughts of others that he often answers questions before they are even asked; it is as though he were gifted with extrasensory perception. In this story however there is no human person for his intellect to identify with; therefore since he encounters what seems impossible he begins to look for a possible equation. Since it was impossible for a human being to commit the murders, M. Dupin begins looking for other sources. By this method of ratiocination and intuitive perception, he is able to solve a mystifying problem that no one else is able to solve. In this way, he becomes the first in a series of brilliant eccentric detectives who can solve difficult murders that baffle everyone else.
‘The Mystery of Marie Roget’ is the first murder story based on the details of a real crime. Poe tried to solve the aforementioned enigma by creating a murder mystery. He situated the narrative in Paris using the details of the original tragedy. Although there was intense media interest and immortalizing of a sort by Poe, the crime remains one of the most puzzling unsolved murders of New York City. Of Poe’s three tales of ratiocination, ‘The Mystery of Marie Roget’ is generally considered the least successful. A modern critic observes: “It might better be called an essay than a story. As an essay, it is a tedious exercise in reasoning. As a story it scarcely exists. It has no life blood, the characters neither move nor speak… Only a professional student of analytics or an inveterate devotee of criminology can read it with any degree of unfeigned interest.”

Poe’s literary rival Rufus Griswold however, voiced a high opinion of the story and considered it as an example of Poe’s cunning intellect.

The theme of the story is a strange murder, which is solved by a man who does not take things for granted. He himself thinks about the subject and knows that not everything is what it seems. Dupin does not trust the eye of the police and starts an investigation of his own. He looks around very carefully. He analyses every possibility and in the end he comes to the right conclusion. Dupin more idiosyncratic than a little egocentric is highly observant and expert at creating chains of reasoning based on his observations. His companion is somewhat a plain man and primarily exists to serve as Dupin’s foil, as well as functioning as an auditor for Dupin’s explanations and a transmitter of his thought.

Poe’s fiction is not concerned with social issues. He viewed the true reality as a process of the mind. Not a fact of physical existence;
consequently, for Poe the human mind rather than the social world is the preferred arena of action. The only aspect of his detective stories that might suggest social relevance is the fact that crime by its very nature is a violation of the social order. It is the task of the detective to restore order once again however although this may be the ultimate result of Dupin’s solving of the crimes that confront him. Dupin wishes to discover order and meaning in the bits of the mysterious reality that surrounds him. If this results in a restoration of the social order as well, then that is an unsought byproduct of his ratiocinative abilities. In ‘The Mystery of Marie Roget’ Poe pits the mind of Dupin against the mass mind which Poe held in absolute contempt. The mass mind is represented by the police and the newspapers. In ‘The Purloined Letter’ again the mind of Dupin is pitted against the mass mind. In ‘The Mystery of Marie Roget’ again Dupin shows extraordinary restraint in coming to conclusion. He can see the highly artificial arrangement of the articles which do indeed ‘look like strips torn off, but purposely and by hand.’

‘The Mystery of Marie Roget’ has never attained the popularity of the other stories featuring Dupin, partly because of its excessively complicated plot. Poe deserves credit however for having deliberately chosen to investigate a real crime under the guise of fiction, a courageous thing to do at any but especially in the America of the 1840s. The story has earned for itself a respected place in the history of detective fiction and this enhanced both Poe’s reputation as an analytical thinker and Dupin’s renown as the infallible solver of intractable problems.

‘The Purloined Letter’ is the third of Poe’s three detective stories, featuring the fictional C. Auguste Dupin again. ‘The Purloined Letter’ is the
shortest of the three but possibly the one which has been most influential in shaping the rationale of the detective fiction. The opening paragraph, for example, might almost be taken for the beginning of any Sherlock Homes story:

At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18------, I was enjoying the two-fold luxury of meditation and a meerschaum, in company with my friend…For one hour at least we had maintained a profound silence while each, to any casual observer, might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the chamber.⁹

Dupin is not a professional detective in ‘Murder in the Rue Morgue.’ He takes up the case for amusement and refuses a financial reward. Whereas in ‘The Purloined Letter,’ he undertakes the case for financial gain. He is not motivated by pursuing truth, emphasized by the lack of information about the contents of the purloined letter. Dupin’s innovative method to solve the mystery is by trying to identity with the criminal. The Minister and Dupin have equally matched minds and combined skills of mathematician and poet. And their battles of wit are treated to end in stalemate. Dupin wins because of his moral strength, the minister is unprincipled, a blackmailer who obtains power by explaining the weakness of others. Whereas Dupin’s investigation in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ established the basic form for a classic mystery, ‘The Purloined Letter’ takes an entirely different route to hire Dupin’s methods of ratiocination and use of creativity to place himself in the mind of the criminal. The case is clear in that the thief and the details of the crime are perfectly obvious, but what is not clear is how to outwit the thief
and return the letter to his rightful owner. The story shows much more of the character of the prefect who merely appeared in order to act disgruntled and embarrassed at the end of the first Dupin story. As a result, the narrative included two characters, the narrator and the prefect, who serve as obvious foils to Dupin, while the minister’s similarities to Dupin advance the concept of double selves that is prevalent in so many of Poe’s stories.

With his energy, obvious emotion, and lack of insight the prefect stands in direct opposition to Dupin’s calmer, more analytical approach to solving cases. His major fault is that he does not understand that the key to solving the case is to think in a way that successfully approximates the mindset of the criminal. Instead, he resorts to trying to find more and more clever ways that he would personally have chosen to hide the letter while chasing answers that are increasingly further away from the correct solution. Whether the case is grisly and bizarre as in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue” or simply clever instance, Monsieur G requires the assistance of Dupin because of his consistent inability to imagine others’ psyche.

The clash between the prefect and Dupin is revealing of their opposing temperaments, but it is also a source of humor, as Dupin constantly but subtly takes ironic verbal jabs at the obvious prefect, whom the story shows at a relative mental disadvantage. When the prefect explains that the owner of the letter contacted the Parisian police to help her retrieve the letter for example, Dupin sarcastically remarks that it must be a reflection of the prefect’s intelligence, a prod which the latter fails to notice, therefore highlighting his inability to understand anyone’s thought but his own. Later, the prefect dismisses the minister because he is a poet and thus a fool, but Dupin notes drollly that he too is something of a poet. The exchange is
entertaining because the prefect is totally unaware of the fact that a poet’s creativity is the trait that allows one to think like a Dupin or a Minister.

On the other side of the drive, between the unimaginative and the analytical, lies Minister D, who might be Dupin’s equal often appearing in Poe’s stories. Minister D. functions as the criminal version of Dupin a man who generally acts on the side of law. Dupin evidently recognizes the similarity, for he tells the narrator that the minister is that monstrum horrendum, an unprincipled man of genius, and he takes pleasure in trumping the minister in a battle of wits. The fake letter that Dupin leaves for the Minister, provides about two Greek brothers from mythology, Atreus and Thyestes. Thyestes commits adultery with Atreus’s wife and in revenge Atreus kills and cooks Thyestes’s sons before feeding them to his brother. Atreus committed great wrong. Thyestes was as much or more at fault because he started the feud. Dupin nonetheless sends the quote to explain that although Dupin may have stolen the letter, the minister was at fault because he committed the crime first.

Despite all the discussion concerning the whereabouts of the letter in ‘The Purloined Letter,’ the letter itself is merely a literary device around which Poe constructs a game of wit. The contents of the letter and its implications in the political sphere are not included because the plot does not need them, and any other object would have served just as well. Significantly, when Dupin finally finds the letter, the Minister has placed it carelessly into a rack hanging from the fire place after folding it inside out and making it appear insignificant. The manner of his hiding the letter is extremely relevant for the purposes of the story, but its inconsequential appearance reflects its relative importance. We might also consider it ironic...
that after all the fuss over the letter, and its contents will never become any more public to the fictional world of Dupin than it will be to the reader.

‘The Purloined Letter’ is a milestone in the history of crime fiction. The Poe standard slips with ‘The Mystery of Marie Roget,’ which is too long and too involved to hold the attention of the reader. ‘Thou Art the Man’ is better and represents one critical step forward in the handling of psychology. “The Gold Bug” is a superior product by any definition: it helps to establish the wider category of the mystery story, the category that will be expanded by Wilkie Collins and Robert Louis Stevenson. While fashioning the detective story, Poe came to regard it as exception that truth is not the object of literary art. He considers it to be a puzzle in which the object is the correct solution so that it resembles a cryptogram. As his practice reveals, the detective fiction is much more than puzzle and is read at least as much for artistic presentation as for the intellectual manipulation of evidence.

The influence of ‘The Purloined Letter’ upon the literature of crime detection has been profound. This can be seen not only in the work of Canan Doyle’s ‘The Naval Treaty’ and ‘A Scandal in Bohemia,’ but in the stories of writers as diverse as G. K. Chesterson, Dorothy L. Sayers and Ellery Queen. With the publication of the three Dupin stories during the years 1841-1845, Poe established for all time the conventions of the genre. The brilliant but eccentric detective, who possesses uncanny, reasoning powers and subordinates, all else to his intellectual gifts, the devoted but less intelligent friend; the puzzling crime which defeats the utmost efforts of the police, the innocent suspect and finally the detailed explanation by the detective and the complete solution of the mystery. Canan Doyle
acknowledged that any writer who sought to emulate Poe in this field was left ‘with no fresh ground they can confidently call their own.’

Poe’s short story ‘The Gold-Bug’ is often compared with Poe’s tales of ratiocinations. The character of Jupiter in this story has been criticized as racist from a modern perspective especially because his speech is written in dialect and because of his often comical dialogues. Jupiter is depicted as superstitious and so lacking in intelligence that he cannot tell his left from his right. The story includes cipher that uses polypholic substitution. Poe did not invent secret writing or cryptography. But he certainly popularized it during his time. To most people in the 19th century, cryptography was mysterious and those able to break the codes were considered gifted with nearly supernatural ability.

In the writing of his story ‘The Gold-Bug’ Poe linked his interest in literary cryptography with detective fiction. In a detective story the pleasure that one derives is by following the working of the mind of the detective. He is a person in whom the real keenness of wit exhibited is great. Poe had, on the other hand, a life-long love for cryptography. Although W.F. Friedman has tried to prove that Poe was simply a dabbler in cryptography and his understanding of this science was far from deep, his interest in cryptography was far from casual. Prof. Friedman, however adds that should a psychological association test be made the word cipher would doubtless bring from most laymen the immediate response, Poe or “The Gold Bug.”

In ‘The Gold-Bug’ William Legrand goes insane. The people think he has become a madman. Yet when Legrand’s conviction fails to waiver they set off on a bizarre journey accompanied by Jupiter, Legrand’s loyal and
equally skeptical servant. What follows is a strange tale of coded messages and uncanny prophecy that will both enthrall and baffle even the most perspective readers. A part horror story ‘The Gold Bug’ is an ingenious tale bearing all the hallmarks of Poe’s extraordinary narrative skill. Legrand is a poor descendant of an old family who enjoys intellectual pursuits and who keeps a mercenary eye for the occasional opportunity to regain some of his wealth. Legrand’s explanation of how he used observation and logic to discover the secret of Captain Kidd’s treasure bears some similarities to Dupin’s method of ratiocination and they both display a fondness for subtly poking fun at others. As in ‘The Premature Burial,’ the first half of ‘The Gold-Bug’ creates what is in hindsight an extremely misleading atmosphere. The narrator does not take Jupiter’s constant suggestions that the bug is actually made of gold and that its bite made Legrand sick and possibly mad at face value but nonetheless Legrand gives no indication that he has refuted Jupiter’s ideas until after they find the treasure chest. Before Legrand explains the significance of the skull and says that he had simply relationship between the gold bug and the image of skull seems sinister.

Jupiter is distinctly a product of the antebellum period in which Poe was writing. Jupiter is a contemporary progressive character for a member of his race living in the south. Nevertheless to the modern reader Poe’s depiction of Jupiter can seem offensive and crude and cultural differences in the modern day understanding of ‘The Gold-Bug’ cannot be ignored. The cipher of which Legrand translates from the parchment is as Legrand states a simple substitution. Legrand is Poe’s representative within the story displaying his parchment for irony and satire by playing with his friend’s suspicions and eventually solving the case with ingenuity. ‘The Gold-Bug’ is
not technically detective fiction because it withholds the evidence until the solution is given. The Legrand character is often compared to Poe’s fictional detective Dupin due to his use of ‘ratiocination.’

The story ‘A Descent into the Maelstrom’ bears some similarities to Poe’s mystery stories in that the story of the Maelstrom has the aura of a detective factor. The story teller has already successfully resolved the story and is now simply explaining his thinking process to a rapt listener. The narrator friend of Dupin, in that he is capable but lacks the final spark that makes Dupin or old fisherman the hero of their respective stories. Another of Poe’s detective fiction story in which Dupin does not appear is ‘Thou Art the Man.’ ‘A Descent into Maelstrom’ makes the villain of the piece. From there it was but step to the criminal because he is indiscernible among the group of ordinary people. It is considered as an early experiment in detective fiction genre. This story however is narrated by the detective himself, who must mystify the reader by presenting a problem to which he already knows the solution. Guilty parties in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ and ‘Thou Art the Man’ are shocked into revealing their secrets. ‘A Descent into Maelstrom’ is often compared with Poe’s essay on ‘Maelzel’s Chess Player.’ Daniel Hoffman says, “the story is an interesting sort of failure because it does not include the dim witted narrator to offset the genius detective.”

‘Thou Art the Man’ does not have Dupin as the observant narrator who in a five paragraph afterward narrates the details and leads the criminal Mr. Goodfellow to destroy himself. The narrator being the detective it can be objected that he manages to make a mystery for the reader out of a problem to which he has known the solution all along. But a common reader
seldom possesses the exotic knowledge and superior reason of the detective and important clues usually mean little to him.

The subject matter of Poe’s story ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ is a murder. It is not a tale of detection like ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ and ‘The Purloined Letter’; there is no investigation of Montresor’s crime and the criminal himself explains how he committed murder. Without a detective in the story, it is up to the reader to solve the mystery. Its plot was convoluted and difficult to follow but made reference to secret societies and ultimately had a main theme of revenge.

Another horror story ‘The Oblong Box’ is about voyage and a mysterious box. Poe’s biographer James Hutchison equates ‘The Oblong Box’ with Poe’s series of ‘tales of ratiocination.’ Scott Peeples compares ‘The Oblong Box’ to this genre as well but notes that it is not strictly a detective story, because it did not emphasize the character of the detective and his method. He also noted that the protagonist is ‘bumbling’ because he allows his personal opinions to taint the physical evidence, leading him to incorrect conclusion.

However, crime fiction is so common that we can hardly imagine the literary scene without it. We assume that every year will bring astronomical sales of Conan Doyle, S.S. Van Dine, Agatha Christie, G.K. Chesterton, Earl Stanley Gardner, Simenon and others. Before Poe there was none of them. Each of the writers named above, and the hord of lesser writers are in Poe’s debt; each is directly or indirectly, his imitator. The craft has become more sophisticated. Clues are placed more artfully; criminals are more cunning than ever before; detectives have become more astute along with them; but no one has improved on the standards set by Poe over a century ago. The
mystery writers of America paid only part of their debt when they established their “Edgar Allan Poe Award” for the best detective story every year.

4.2 GOTHICSM IN POE’S HORROR STORIES:

However there can be little doubt that the prose narrative Gothic has flourished more in America than in England. Prof. Leslie Fieldler thinks that “The European Gothic reaches the level of important art only in poetry or drama, not in fiction; in America quite the opposite is the case.”

Serious American novel started with the Gothic. There are many reasons for the appeal of the Gothic to the American imagination. There is of course the factor which Fieldler so aptly describes. He says, “The death of love left a vaccum at the effective heart of the American novel into which there rushed the love of death.”

The origin of American Gothic linked with the efforts of the European Protestantism where the sins of Europe will not be visited. This remained only ideal. Guilt and sin were brought to America and a sensitive author was going to portray all this in his writings. The Gothic provided the writer a new world to explore and a new method by which this exploration might be communicated.

When Poe appeared on the American literary scene more than seventy-year old tradition in Gothic writing existed. In his more memorable tales Poe capitalizes on the contemporary interest in the Gothic. It should be remembered that there are no Gothic ruins in America. Poe’s own knowledge of Gothic architecture must have come from secondary sources because his sojourn in England was only of five years and that also in childhood. However Poe makes reference to the school where he studied in
England in ‘William Wilson’ and refers to the Gothic steeple of the school building. Gothic architecture, nevertheless, abounds in his tales. There are no concrete descriptions of Gothic buildings in his tales and the significance of such building lies in their dilapidation and ruin. In Poe’s tales the most conspicuous aspect of Gothic building is their age and their dilapidated condition. Other Gothic devices like supernatural occurrences, ghosts and specters are there.

The literary composition of Poe especially his short stories of terror based on supernatural or psychological manifestations, continue to be highly praised by a secret group of readers who relish the dark, nightmarish worlds of humans existence with their roots firmly established in the ancient past. In tales like ‘The Tell-Tale Heart,’ ‘The Pit and the Pendulum,’ ‘The Black Cat,’ ‘The Premature Burial’ and ‘The Fall of the House of Usher,’ the strange unnerving familiarity with the characters and situations can be sensed which allows the reader to subconsciously relate to the macabre experiences and thoughts of the main protagonists.

The presence of horror elements in the tales has troubled many Poe enthusiasts. There are the discerning critics who admire Poe’s ability to harrow our emotions but unfriendly critics cite this to his disadvantage. They charge Poe with creating horror for the sake of thrill. A look at the scattered references to horror in the criticism and tales of Poe would confirm the impression that the Gothic is not there for the purpose of ornamentation alone.

In ‘The Premature Burial’ Poe makes a very forthright statement: “There are certain themes of which the interest is all absorbing but which are
too horrible for the purpose of legitimate fiction.”¹⁴ When he speaks of ‘terror of the soul’ he is not thinking of vampirism or the like, although many critics have imputed vampire motif in ‘Ligeia’ and ‘The Fall of House of Usher.’ He rather uses the Gothic decor to evoke an atmosphere in which terrible things happen. That Poe uses Gothic for a legitimate result is also obvious from his letter to Philip Cooke. Commenting on his stories like ‘Ligeia’ and ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ Poe says, “your word that it is ‘intelligible’ suffices and your commentary sustains your word. As for the mob let them talk on. I should be grieved if I thought they comprehended me here.”¹⁵ The Gothic framework is only a mask in such tales. Moreover it is unlikely that an author who works hidden meanings in his tales will use any mannerism only for ornamentation.

The story ‘The Pit and the Pendulum’ opens with an account of a victim of the Spanish inquisition. The opening paragraph reveals the unknown protagonist upon being given the death sentence. His initial fear is that he has been buried alive. He is trapped in a prison. After discerning the size of the dungeon, he falls and finds himself lying at the brink of a bottomless pit while strapped to a framework that a pendulum of glistening steel is suspended above him. For him death seems inevitable until the pendulum ceases its movement and withdraws into darkness. His situation then becomes more ominous as the walls of “burning iron” closing in on him, causing the dungeon to squeeze into a lozenge. As his foothold shrinks to nothing, a hand reaches out and rescues him from the hands of his enemies.

‘The Pit and the Pendulum’ is about the torments endured by a prisoner of the Spanish Inquisition. The narrator describes his experience
being tortured. The story is especially effective at inspiring fear in the reader because of its heavy focus on the senses, such as sound, emphasizing its reality unlike many of Poe’s stories which are aided by the supernatural. The traditional elements established in popular horror tales at the time are followed, but critical reception has been mixed.

‘The Pit and Pendulum’ is probably the most celebrated instance of narrative wrenched away from the gradually emerging patterning characteristic of longer fiction. Poe’s nameless narrator totally alone desperately uses his intellect and reason at full stretch to discover what in normal experience could be taken for granted where he is and what movements he can make. His historical situation as a victim of the Spanish Inquisition provides a reason for his imprisonment but beyond that it has little importance. What Poe is really interested in is the nightmarish situation in which a man under sentence of death is deprived of all the usual means by which people locate themselves in time as well as in space. Poe uses the compression of the story to investigate experience outside normal time and consequently he summarizes all the information a reader might require.

Such stories often have great verve, a highly emotional style and more often than not, they are totally absurd. The eerie tales of another 19th century American writer Charles Fenno Hoffman, display all of these qualities in ‘The Man in the Reservoir.’ It is difficult to see how a story set inside a ship’s boiler could fail to be unified. In the exaggerated manner, Hoffman and Poe demonstrate how a single effect can be achieved by inventing situations the very nature of which is to separate characters from the sequential flow of time.
As a unique work of a bizarre imagination a story like ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ is certainly a formidable achievement between the opening when the narrator one day first sees the melancholy house surrounded by decayed trees and eerily mirrored in the still waters of the tarn and the final crash as “the deep and dark tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the ‘House of Usher.’” Poe draws a taut atmosphere. The narrative is actually very loose, but the portentous mood is not diminished by the fact that events cover far more than a single day; or by the narrator’s vagueness about whether the terrible night of Madeline’s reappearance occurs on the seventh day after he and Roger have placed her body in the vault. The author shows a fine economy of narrative when it matters most notably at the climax where exactitude of description fuses with theatricality. Roderick’s death is made syntactically as well as factually simultaneous with Madeline’s.

Repeated or imitated however the features which make ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ memorable become pallid. Readers quickly learn the conventions according to which individual devices produce particular effects. D. H. Lawrence thinks Poe offered a “Concatenation of cause and effect.” The chain might be intricate as it was in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ but a chain it was belonging properly speaking to tale not story. Behind Lawrence’s objection to the mechanical quality of Poe’s technique is the feeling that art can become the enmity of life. Poe actually expressed this very perception in his emblematic story almost a parable ‘The Oval Portrait.’ At the very instant when the painter captures the life of his beloved sister, he realizes that she is dead. It is a chilling story, but its emotional impact is
lessened by the neatness of its construction which is logical rather than imaginative.

Poe’s celebrated protagonist, Roderick Usher not only suffers as a victim of ‘the grim phantasm fear,’ but also inflicts his madness, a ‘morbid acuteness of the senses’ upon his sister Madeline, who is slowly dying from the result of some unidentified Usher by suggesting his fears are unfounded, but Usher is convinced that death is imminent, whereby Madeline abruptly dies. Usher proceeds to inter Madeline in the family crypt and soon imagines he has accidentally buried her alive. His fears of premature burial are soon realized, for he begins to hear odd movements in the house. Madeline then appears in Roderick’s chamber, where she falls dead into his arms as ‘a corpse and a victim to the terrors anticipated.’ The narrator flees from the house as the ‘deep and dark turn’ swallows up fragments of the House of Usher.

‘The Cask of Amontillado’ has been read as one of the greatest short stories in which Poe’s theory of the unity of effect gets its best expression. The story establishes Poe as the past-master in condensation. The single effect is by general consensus, irony. ‘The Cask’ is a motiveless exercise in the Gothic. James Gargano says that ‘The Cask’ presents an ironic vision of two men who, as surrogates of mankind, enter upon a cooperative venture that really exposes their psychological isolation. It is a tale of human perversity and evil.

In the opening sentence of the story Montressor tries to give a reason for his taking revenge upon Frotunato. It is as vague a reason as vagueness could devise. Here is the insult which Fornunato ventured upon Montressor.
He is actually like the narrator of ‘The Imp of the Perverse’ who commits a calculated murder. The narrator of ‘The Imp of the Perverse for months ponders on the means of murder which will go undetected. In the same way, Montressor is not at all in hurry to murder Fortunato. He takes pride in his determination. This determination makes him search for suitable opportunity to execute his well-laid plan. He knows the weakness of Fortunato. He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine although in this respect Montressor himself does not differ from Fortunato materially. He selects the carnival time to execute his plan. Upto this time Montressor has never given out anything by which fortunate could suspect; on the contrary “neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued as was my wont to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation.”

During the carnival time he encounters Fortunato although he pretends that it is a causal encounter he had particularly chosen the time that the meeting was deliberate. When Fortunato offers to go to Montressor’s place he declines the offer twice. Ultimately he accepts the offer. That everything is carefully manipulated by Montressor becomes evident from the absence of the servants from his house.

The ground is cleaned for the immolation of Fortunato. Very soon they reason they reach the catacombs. Fortunato is still under the influence of wine. He says ‘the gait of my friend was unsteady and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.’ Montressor asks him to return. The greater the hesitation of Montressor to take Fortunato where the cask of Amontillado is kept, the more vociferous becomes the determination of Fortunato. At this stage, Montressor gives cause. Montressor says to Fortunato that he was
rich, respected, admired and beloved. So it is sufficient for the ‘Imp of the Perverse’ in Montressor to commit the murder. That Fortunato had not insulted Monstressor is clear enough from another context. Unsuspecting Fortunato finds himself fettered and walled up. Still he considers it is a monstrous joke as is evident.

Had Fortunato insulted Montressor at least at the last moment of his life he must have certainly remembered it and would have asked for Montressor’s forgiveness. He does nothing of the kind. Finding the joke becoming grim he asks Montressor to leave him, ‘for the love of God.’ The mockery of Montressor silences him finally. At the end, Montressor says, ‘my heart grew sick on account of the dampness of the catacombs.’ Actually it is not the dampness but the knowledge that the murder will go undetected, that his heart grows sick. It will be his lot after fifty years to relive the story and confess the crime done for the wrong reason.

The repetition of the word ‘Amontillado’ as Fortunato is led to his entombment contributes to the irony in the tale. Charles Steele suggests that Poe might have had a pun in mind, since the Italian Ammonticchiato and the Spanish Amontanado both in sound remotely resemble the name of the wine and both mean ‘collected in a heap.’ He adds, “collected in a heap” suits very well the pile of bricks revealed at the climax of the story. Poe was an inveterate punster…already a grim pun on mason is surely recognizable…” Also Dana Nelson has dealt with the infamous drinking and carousing habit of the freemasons. the narrator adopts an ironic posture in the telling of the tale. The victim’s good nature, nobility of disposition in walking so unsuspectingly into the narrator’s trap is contrasted with the cold blooded calculation with which the narrator leads him into it. As he explains in the
initial paragraph his whole plan is to bring his victim to a shocking realization of his revenge.

‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ and ‘Ligeia,’ represent the highest achievement in the literary genre of the Gothic horror story. By Gothic, one means that the author emphasizes the grotesque, the mysterious, the desolate, the horrible, the ghastly and ultimately the abject fear that can be aroused in either the reader or in the viewer. Almost everyone is familiar with such characters as Dr. Frankenstein’s monster and Count Dracula, two of today’s pop culture horror characters who evolve from the Gothic tradition, and it is probably not an exaggeration to say that most adults in the Western world have been exposed to some type of gothic tale. We know that a gothic story will often have a setting that will be in an old, decaying mansion far out in a desolate countryside; the castle will be filled with cobwebs, strange noises, bats and an abundance of secret panels and corridors.

‘The Black Cat’ is a story in which the protagonist is haunted by maddening hostile feeling with no recognizable cause. His wife is congenial and happy and she shares his love for animals, especially for their pet cat Pluto. The unnamed narrator begins drinking to excess, “for what disease is like alcohol! And his disposition radically deteriorates. He mistreats his wife and their numerous pets including Pluto. For after arriving home late one night from the local tavern, he seizes Pluto and cuts out one of its eyes with a knife. He then wanders outside and hangs Pluto from the limb of tree. His home quite unexpectedly catches fire and burns to the grounds; shortly after, he obtains another cat much like Pluto with the exception of a white pattern on its belly. He becomes fond of the new cat but soon begins to despair due
to the white patch taking on the image of a hideous of ghastly thing of the gallows. He subsequently attempts to kill the new cat with an axe, but when his wife interferes he turns on her and buries the idea in her brain. Whereupon she falls dead upon the spot without a groan he then walls up her body in the cellar in an attempt to conceal his ghastly crime. Four days pass and he is happy at peace and sleeps well. The local police become suspicious of his wife’s disappearance and begin to search the premises. Ending up in the cellar they suddenly have the scream of unknown entity; the protagonist, upon hearing the screams and knowing they are real, admits his guilt as the police tear down the wall and the black cat howling its revenge sits atop the head of the victim. One night returning from his usual alcoholic bouts he feels that the cat is avoiding him. He seizes him. In his fright the cat ‘inflicts a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth.’ This sends him into a rage:

The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame.21

‘The Black Cat’ illustrates best the capacity of the human mind to observe its own deterioration and the ability to comment upon its own destruction without being able to halt that deterioration. The narrator is fully aware of his mental deterioration, and at certain points, he recognizes the change that is occurring within him, and he tries to do something about it, but he finds himself unable to reverse his falling into madness. The chief effect that Poe wanted to achieve was a sense of absolute and total perverseness. Clearly many of the narrator’s acts are without logic or motivation; they are merely acts of perversity. The tale records a number of
incidents that follow as a succession of natural causes and effects; and, to use Poe’s own words, ‘one incident begets another.’

In ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ perhaps the most famous of Poe’s tales of terror, the protagonist is vividly described. His paranoia is unfounded yet he suffers under false delusions. He produces to vent these fears upon an innocent old man who had never wronged him. He realizes that his fears are directly related to the evil eye of the old man, which prompts him to take the life of the old man. The victim is then murdered in his sleep and his dismembered body ends up beneath the floor of his bedroom. But the protagonist succumbs to his guilt and confesses his crime to the local police – “I admit the dead! – Tears up the planks –here, here! – it is the beauty of his hideous heart!”22 The story is a study of terrors but more specifically, the memory of terror as the narrator is relating events from the past. The first word of the story, ‘True!’ is an admission of his guilt. This introduction serves immediately to grab the reader’s attention and pull him into the story. From there, every word contributes to the purpose of moving the story forward possibly making ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ the best example of Poe’s theories on perfect short stories.

The story is a psychological portrait of a mad narrator who kills a man. ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ is simultaneously a horror story and psychological thriller told from a first-person perspective. It is admired as an excellent example of how a short story can produce an effect on the reader. Poe believed that all good literature must create a unity of effect on the reader and this effect must reveal truth or evoke emotions. The story exemplifies Poe’s ability to expose the dark side of mankind and is a harbinger of the modern novels and films dealing with psychological realism.
In the story, ‘The Premature Burial’ Poe continues to be so vilified. This will occur even as he has forever writing the horror tale. Poe has used his understanding of the ‘fear of fear’ to write convincingly with it. He has used an item of human experience, it may be asserted, without hesitation, that no event is so terribly well adopted to inspire the supremeness of bodily and of mental distress as is burial before death.

From the very first word fearful Poe hooks his reader’s attention. As he stated in his essay to do so is a prerequisite. Poe goes on to such a length as to cause thinking of an experience in one’s own life, and then suffocate from one’s own thinking. Poe’s use of ambiguous imagery of the human anatomy, which if one was not knowledgeable of his motif, one would be inextricably misled to believe he is too grotesque to bother with. The entire process of ‘getting ready for bed’ he names an ‘elaborate precaution’ then, each of these preparation for bed, are enumerated. For example, ‘the family vault’ is his brain. The remodeling is more than his having learned new techniques of thinking. The ‘long lover’ is his arm, such that if one touched it, it caused ‘the iron portals,’ his eyes, ‘to fly back.’ The arrangement for air and light are but his nose and eyes as is the ‘convenient receptacles for food and water.’

‘Metzengerstein’ narrates the story of evil passions of a young person’s soul. Because of the hereditary family hate, the two families cannot but rival each other. This but reminds us Mark Twain’s depiction of rivalry between the two families Shepherdsons and Gangerbirds in his novel *Huck Finn*. Although horrors abound in the tale, its depiction is done in a masterly way. This horror story follows the young Frederick the last of the Metzengerstein family who carries on a long standing feud with the
Berlifitzing family. Suspected of causing a fire that kills the Berlifitzing family patriarch, Frederick becomes intrigued with a previously unnoticed and untamed horse. The horse displays ‘ferocious and demonlike’ qualities. It is a mysterious horse. Metzengerstein is punished for his cruelty when his own home catches fire and the horse carries him into the flame. The story follows many conventions of Gothic fiction and to some extent exaggerates those conventions. Because of this critics and scholars debate if Poe intended the story to be taken seriously. The most obvious example is the gloomy old castle, typical of Gothic fiction. The story includes typical gothic themes, which scholar Sova Dawn, refers to as “hints at secret obsessions and sins foreboding prophecies, family rivalry.” These Gothic conventions had been a staple of popular fiction in Europe and America for several decades by the time Poe utilized them. The story uses irony as a form of humor. Despite the family’s prophecy that the morality of Metzengerstein shall triumph over the immortality of Berlifitzing. The suggestion that Metzengersten is written as a satire is disputed. The atmosphere combines both realistic and supernatural worlds while depicting pathological emotional states, it has been called a precursor to ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ and other later stories.

‘The Assignment’ is an obvious love story. In this we encounter the death of two lovers who have been separated in life.

‘Morella’ is a horror story depicting an unnamed narrator Morella, a woman who delves into forbidden pages of mysticism. As a result of her experimentation, her soul can never die, but her physical form continues to deteriorate. She spends her time in bed and teaches her husband the black arts. Realizing her curse, her husband (the narrator), becomes frightened and
wishes for his wife’s death and eternal peace. She dies in childbirth but her soul passes into the new baby. As the daughter gets older, the narrator notices she bears an uncanny resemblance to her mother, but he refuses to give the child a name. By her tenth birthday, the resemblance to Morella is frightening. Her father decides to have her baptized to release any evil from her, but this event brings the mother’s soul back into her daughter. At the ceremony, the priest asks the daughter’s name to which the narrator replies, ‘Morella.’ Immediately the daughter replies, “I am here!” and dies. The narrator himself bears her body to the tomb and finds no trace of the first Morella where he lays the second.

The narrator’s decision to name his daughter Morella implies his subconscious desire for her death, just as he had for her mother’s rebirth maybe her becoming a vampire to wreak vengeance on him. Poe explores the idea of what happens to identify after death, suggesting that if identity survived death it could exist outside the human body and return to new bodies. He was influenced in part by the theories of identity by Fridrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, ‘Morel’ is the name of black nightshade, a poisonous weed related to onene from which the drug belladonna is derived. It occurs in Presburg, a home of black magic. Poe features dead or dying wives’ tales of resurrection or communication from beyond the grave.

In ‘Berenice’ Poe was following the popular traditions of Gothic fiction. Poe however made his Gothic stories more sophisticated, dramatizing terror by using more realistic images. This story is one of Poe’s most violent. As the narrator looks at the box which he may subconsciously know contains his cousin’s teeth, he asks himself. “Why … did the hairs of my head erect themselves on end, and the blood of my body become
congealed within my vein?” Poe does not actually include the scene where the teeth are pulled out. The reader knows that Egaeus was in a trance like state at the time, incapable of responding to evidence that his cousin was still alive as he committed the gruesome act. Additionally the story emphasizes that all 32 of her teeth were removed.

‘Berenice’ is one of Poe’s most famous tales. In a letter to H. G. White, Poe admitted that ‘Berenice’ was far too horrible but went on to a defense of the theme of the tale on the ground that magazines owned their chief success to a quality like that. The chief character of the story Egaeus belongs to a family of ‘gloomy, gray, hereditary’ parents:

Our line has been called a race of visionaries and in many striking particulars in the character of the family mansion, in the frescos of the chief saloon, in the tapestries of the dormitories in the chiseling of some buttresses in the armory but more especially in gallery of antique painting in the fashion of the library chamber and a lastly in the very peculiar nature of the library’s contents there is more than sufficient evidence to warrant the belief.25

Here the narrator lives with his cousin, Berenice. Although both grow together, their constitution and nature are different:

Ill of health and buried in gloom- she, gracefull and overflowing with energy hears the ramble on the hillside- mine the studies of the cloister; I living within my own heart, and addicted body and soul, to the most intense and painful meditation- she roaming carelessly through life, with no
thought of the shadows in her path, or the silent flight of the raven winged hours.\textsuperscript{26}

However, this agile and graceful girl falls a prey to a ‘fatal disease.’ The narrator, who during the bright days of her unparalleled beauty never loved her, but now, proposes marriage. But his passions are mental and not physical. Some time before the marriage Egaeus sees his beloved and finds her excessively emaciated:

The forehead was high, and very pale and singularly placid; and the once jetty hair fell partially over it, and overshadowed the hollow temples with innumerable ringlets now of a vivid yellow and jarring discordantly, in their fantastic character, with the reigning melancholy of the countenance. The eyes were lifeless, and lusterless, and seemingly pupilless, and I shrank involuntarily from their glassy stare to the contemplation of the thin and shrunken lips. They parted; and in a smile of peculiar meaning the teeth of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view. Would to God that I had never beheld them, or that having done so I had died!\textsuperscript{27}

The story ‘Hop-Frog’ is one of Poe’s revenge tales along with ‘The Cask of Amontillado.’ In the story the murderer seems to get away without punishment for his deeds. While the victim in ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ wears motley, in ‘Hop-Frog’ the murderer is wearing it. ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ represents Poe’s attempt at literary revenge on a personal enemy. ‘Hop-Frog’ may have had similar motivation. The story uses the grating of hop-frog’s teeth as a symbolic element, just before he comes up
with his plan for revenge. Poe often used teeth as a sign of morality, as in lips writhing about teeth of the mesmerized man in ‘The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar’ and in the obsession over teeth in ‘Berenice.’

The tale written toward the end of Poe’s life was somewhat autobiographical. The Jester Hop-Frog like Poe was “kidnapped from home and presented to the king bearing a name not given in baptism but conferred upon him… and susceptible to wine… when insulted and forced to drink becomes insane with rage.”\textsuperscript{28} Like Hop-Frog, Poe was bothered by those who urged him to drink, despite a single glass of wine making him drunk.

In the story ‘A Tale of the Ragged Mountains’ Mr. Bedloe was a protagonist, who is peculiar in his appearance. He is always apologetic about his present physical infirmities and asserts that a long series of neuralgic attacks had reduced him from a condition of more than usual personal beauty to that. He is attended by a solicitous physician of perhaps seventy years of age who believes in the doctrines of Mesmer. Bedloe is suffering from phthisis. The magnetic remedies of Dr. Templeton alleviate his acute pains. Every morning immediately after his breakfast a strong cup of coffee was all that he took in the forenoon. He took a large dose of morphine and set forth upon a long ramble among the Ragged Mountains.

One day Bedloe becomes late in his return. Once after his ultimate return, he narrates a tale of extraordinary happenings in which he participates. The battle runs out to be the insurrection of Cheyte Sing against Hastings in which Dr. Templeton’s friend Oldeb is fatally wounded. Dr. Templeton is obviously writing an account of the battle when Bedloe is imagining about the happenings. The tale tries to establish that in a
mesmeric trance the soul can realize its true nature, and Bedloe might be Oldeb of old. But within a week of this discovery Bedloe dies. This story relates to an event in Indian history.

Poe’s another story ‘The Masque of the Red Death’ follows Prince Prospero’s attempts to avoid a dangerous and terrible plague known as the Red Death by hiding in his abbey. He along with many other wealthy nobles has a masquerade ball within seven rooms of his abbey, each decorated with a different color. In the midst of their revelry, a mysterious figure enters and makes his way through each of the rooms. When Prospero confronts this stranger he falls dead. The story follows many conventions of traditional Gothic fiction and is often analyzed as an allegory about the inevitability of death, though some critics do not agree with this. Many different interpretations have been presented as well as attempts to identify the true nature of the ‘Red Death’ disease. This traditional Gothic fiction includes the setting of a castle. The multiple single tower rooms may be representative of the human mind, showing different personality types. The imagery of blood indicates corporeality. The entire story is an allegory about man’s futile attempts to avoid death; this interpretation is commonly accepted. However there is much dispute over how to interpret ‘The Masque of the Red Death.’

Poe’s story ‘The Sphinx’ depicts the disease of cholera that occurred in New York City presumably during the summer of 1832. The narrator visits a man near the Hudson River north of the city for two weeks. There the two men observe the massive destruction that cholera is causing from afar, as they hear the news each day of one of their friends who died from the terrible illness.
In this instance the narrator’s fear of death has consumed him and he thought that a tiny insect that was nearby was in fact an enormous monster that was very far away. ‘The Sphinx’ as a sketch differs from the Gothic comic piece. It is a fine study of viewpoint affected by physical distance and mood. The tale starts in a truly Gothic strain. Both in character and incident it is given the consistent development of a Gothic romance. The narrator is by his disposition a typically Gothic character. The situation in which he is placed is fraught with the ominous fear of death.

‘The Imp of the Perverse’ is the story of a person who murders a wealthy man and inherits his wealth. He commits a very deliberate and calculated murder. During the course of his studies he stumbles upon a novel way of murder by placing a poisonous candle in the bed-room of the victim. The victim has the habit of reading in bed. The apartment which he occupies is narrow and ill ventilated. The narrator places a poisonous candle of his own devising in the candlestand of the victim. And the next morning the wealthy man is discovered dead in his bed and the coroner’s verdict was ‘death by the visitation of God.’ For years he lives contented on the wealth inherited. Detection and suspicion both are out of the question. Only incriminating evidence - the remains of the poisoned taper had been destroyed. So we cannot say anything about conviction.

‘The Oval Portrait’ is a horror story. It begins with an injured narrator seeking refuge in an abandoned mansion in the Apennines with no explanation for his wound. He spends his time admiring the works of art decorating the strangely shaped room and pursuing a volume which purported to criticize and describe the paintings. He eventually discovers a
painting which shocks him with its extreme realism, which he refers to as absolute life-likeliness of expression.

In addition to the several tales of Poe that fall predominantly in one group or another, there are certain tales with unique features, defying a strict classification. Tales such as ‘The Assignation,’ ‘The Man of the Crowd’ and ‘William Wilson’ are cases in point. However since these tales have some Gothic lineaments, they are analyzed in this section.

‘The Visionary’ or ‘The Assignation’: It is essentially a romantic story. The background of the incidents and the behavior of the characters must be shrouded in a veil of mystery. The protagonist is reluctant to dispose his identity and background and tries to mystify the narrator. While the narrator in ‘The Fall of House of Usher’ is intimately associated with the central character and right from the beginning his role is clear and definite. The narrator in “Assignation” comes into action only after the drowning scene, offering the services of his gondola to the hero. Here the author’s attempt to present the character’s behavior in a state of ambiguity and the suggestive hints thrown by him in the course of the narration contribute to the mystery. The solution to his mysterious nature of the incidents suddenly comes to the narrator at the end. A consciousness of the entire and terrible truth flash on him. The nature of the assignation has at once flashed upon the reader too. Both the lady and the lover appoint an assignation in death through an intuitive understanding of each other’s meaning. This technique of the tale is one of suggestion and mystery which are best preserved by the peripheral role that the narrator assumes. The opening incident of the baby drowning is at once dramatic beginning to the tale and a necessary crisis which brings the lovers together at an intensely emotional moment, and thus
prepares them for the assignation. The episode provides the necessary background for the assignation.

‘William Wilson’ explores the theme of double. The second self haunts the protagonist and leads him to insanity and represents his own insanity. According to Poe’s biographer Arthur Hobson Quinn the second self represents the conscience.” This division of the self is reinforced by the narrator’s admission. ‘William Wilson’ is actually a pseudonym. The name itself is an interesting choice: “son of will.” William Wilson has willed himself into being along with the double which shares that name. An unnamed narrator announces that his real name shall remain a mystery, for he wishes to preserve the purity of the page before him. Instead the narrator asks that we know him as ‘William Wilson’ throughout the tale of mystery and crime that he is about to tell. He explains that tale will explain his sudden and complete turn to evil. Poe has doubles like the twins Roderick and Madeline Usher in ‘The Fall of House of Usher.’ While Poe focuses on Roderick and Madeline’s physical relationship he is interested in the psychological self-splitting that produces the two William Wilsons in ‘William Wilson.’ He portrays this psychological condition through the manifestation of another body. The final image of the murder-suicide points to the ultimate inseparability of body and mind. The narrator may be plagued mentality and intellectually by his rival double, but he can register his revenge only in physical, corporeal terms such as the thrust of his sword that carries with it the angst of his tortured mind.

Poe’s study of psychology in ‘William Wilson’ anticipates the major theories of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis and one of the 20th century’s most important psychologists. Poe’s notion of the rival’s double
predates Freud’s concept of the repressed, unconscious alter ego by at least half a century. Like Freud Poe associates the alter ego with a universal psychological condition, unaffected by specifics of time and place. William Wilson’s double follows him across Europe from England to Italy and from childhood to adulthood life. It is clear that the narrator’s mental splitting of himself into two William Wilsons does not result from aggravating factors of specific environment, since the narrator purposefully moves to different environments in an attempt to elude his double. The doppelganger represents the narrator’s attempt to project an inner evil on the outside world.

‘The Man of the Crowd’ concerns an old man who cannot endure to be alone. Because of the anguish of remorse he seems to have lost all connection with the people and places around him. The narrator during his observation of the mob sees a decrepit old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age whose countenance because of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression holds his attention. He says, “Anything even remotely resembling that expression I had never seen before. I well remember that my first thought upon beholding it was that Retzce... had he viewed it. Would have greatly preferred it to his own pictural incarnations of the fiend.” This singularity of the old man fascinates him and looks at him carefully and finds that he was short in stature, very thin and apparently very feeble. His clothes generally were filthy and ragged.

After closely following the old man he gives up the chase and beholds the old man. He feels that the old man has an uneasy conscience. Because of this he likes to forget himself in the crowd. He ends the pursuit of the old man saying: “This old man is in the type and genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd.”
George E. Woodberry thinks ‘Shadow- A Parable’ at once the most noble and most artistic expression of Poe’s imagination during the first period of his career. T.O. Mabbott asserts that the tale “is one of the finest of all Poe’s productions.” The tale opens with a rhetorical address by the narrator who is the central character himself. He is speaking to the whole of the living humanity, as it were, from the Valley of the Shadows. The narrator proceeds to tell us about the horrifying experiences of seven characters, who are shut inside an ancient chamber, in an ancient Greek city, on the eve of a pestilence that had struck the whole of the city. The characters are visited by the frightening vision of a death like shadow. Thus the time and occasion are set for an appalling kind of experience. The description of these circumstances as well as of the chamber is done largely in terms of Gothic tales.

In ‘The Oblong Box’ the narrator tells the story of one of his friends Cornelius Wyatt who “had the ordinary temperament of genius, and was a compound of misanthropy, sensibility and enthusiasm.” They travel together on a boat. A strong gale forces all the occupants of the ship to move on to a boat for safety. All passengers and crew take their seats on the boat with minimum of luggage. But Wyatt insists on taking the oblong box with him. On finding the boat out of his reach Wyatt, binding himself to the box, jumps in the sea and dies. The captain of the ship informs the narrator that the oblong box contained the corpse of Wyatt’s adored wife.

‘MS. Found in a Bottle’ is a grim story of horror. Poe refers to the mere physique of the horrible which prevails in the tale and says that, he would not be guilty of a similar absurdity. In this connection he contrasts the mere physical sensations of the tale. The reader faces with a series of incredible
events. According to Joseph T. Shipley, “Fantasy includes in the action, character or setting things that are impossible under ordinary conditions or in the normal course of human events. In the case of no other genre is the willing suspension of disbelief so requisite.”

The narrator achieves our willing suspension of disbelief and tells us of his horrors on a spectre ship. The ship on which the narrator is traveling is overtaken by a storm. An old Swede and the narrator remain as the only survivors. For five days they remain on the hulk of their ship when a far bigger ship overtakes it. The old ship sinks and the narrator finds himself on a ghost ship. On this ship he has sensations of horror, but he feels that he is hurrying onwards to some exciting knowledge.

Likewise, the narrator of Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* tells the reader: “How will your wonder and that of your companions, be exited by my story! Every sentiment will yield to your amazement. Listen to my narrative and then say what it is that has made me deserve to be placed on this dreadful eminence, if indeed, every faculty be not suspended in wonder that I am still alive and am able to relate it.”

Thus in Brown too, as in Poe, there is an attempt to rivet the reader’s attention to the course of the events. The narrator of ‘MS Found in a Bottle’ however is unlike the narrator of ‘Legeia’ in that he is more rational and the events narrated are not emanations of his disturbed mind. The story ends with horror elements:

Oh, horror upon! – the ice opens suddenly to the right, and to the left, and we are whirling dizzily, in immense concentric circles, round and round the borders of a gigantic amphitheatre the summit of whose walls is lost in the darkness and the distance…the circles rapidly grow small- we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool- and
amid a roaring and bellowing and thundering of ocean and tempest the
ship is quivering – oh God! And – going down!36

‘The Facts in the Case of Valdemar’ is a scientific report. It is the best
eexample of a tale of suspense and horror. Poe uses particularly descriptions.
In this story the narrator tells us what should be the object of a mesmeric
trance. As a subject for his experimentation he chooses M. Valdemar whom
his physicians had declared to be in a confirmed phthisis. M. Valdemar
agrees to subject of the narrator and promises that he would send for Mr. P.,
as he calls him, twenty-four hours before the period announced by his
physician as that of his decease. When the hour of M. Valdemar’s death
approaches Mr. P. arrives on the scene and hypnotizes him. Under the
influence of the hypnotic trance M. Valdemar forgets his pain. M. Valdemar
dies, yet lives. “Yes; no; - I have been sleeping - and now – now I am dead,
says M. Valdemar.”37 Mr. Valdemar remains under this trance for a period
nearly seven months. But the result of awakening him from this trance is
horrifying. The last words of Valdemar are: “For God’s sake! - quick!-
quick! - put me to sleep- or Quick! - waken me! - quick! - I say to you that I
am dead!”38 A closer examination of the tale reveals that Poe uses
mesmerism to achieve his effect by means of verisimilitude or to use his
own coinage ‘life likeliness’ or ‘lifelikeness.’ His two coinages of the
synonyms show the importance to him of the concept and the artistic
method. In his letter to P.P. Cooke, Poe refers to Miss Elizabeth Barrett’s
opinion regarding the tale:

Then there is a tale of his…. About mesmerism (The Valdemar
Case) throwing us all into most admired disorder or dreadful
doubts as to whether it can be true as the children say of ghost
stories. The certain thing in the tale in question is the power of the writer and the faculty he has of making horrible improbabilities seem near and familiar.”

In his letter to Evert Duyckinck Poe makes clear his own conception of verisimilitude. Referring to “Valdemar Case” he says:

In my “Valdamar case” (which was credited by many) I had not the slightest idea that any person should credit it as anything more than a “Magazine Paper” but the whole strength is laid out in verisimilitude.

The incident of the arrest of death by the extraordinary power of mesmerism is in itself highly incredible but Poe’s art lies in rendering it serious and credible by a skilful marshalling of plausible details. Arthur H. Quinn says:

The frame of the story is realistic, the actions of the characters with the exception of Valdemar, are possible. The result is impossible. But the critical faculties have been dulled by the influence of plausible details, and the story was taken seriously.

Poe’s central object is no doubt to create a sense of horror, and in doing this he has carefully established the circumstances and prepared our minds by means of several significant methods. The narrative is given a historical authenticity. In the opening paragraph the case would have taken for a miracle; but the narrator in effect gives a convincing account of it and makes an impossible thing seem entirely plausible under the circumstances.
of the case. This tale is different from tales like ‘The Balloon Hoax’ in that it contains the semblance of emotional excitement. There is an attempt at gradual intensification of horror through the indistinct replies of Valdemar and the description of his changing aspect: “… so hideous beyond conception was the appearance of M. Valdemar at this moment that there was a general shrinking back from the region of the bed.”

4.3 Poe’s Gothic Romance:

Romanticism in literature is a movement that took place in most countries of the western World in the late 18th and 19th centuries. The Romantic Movement was one which began in Germany, moved through all of Europe and Russia and almost simultaneously changed the entire course of American literature. Romanticism is a reaction against forms and rules against classicism and neoclassicism; and also against rationalism and fixed genres. The Romantic literary genres are new modes of imagination and vision which especially value freedom of form, spontaneous self expression and subjectivity. Romanticism grew from the rejection of the 18th century doctrines of restraint, objectivity, decorum and rationalism. It was fed by the growing concerns with folk expression, primitivism, the sublime, the remote, past gothic architecture, the ballad, sentimental melancholy, mysticism and the life of common people. In the United States, the Romantic Movement dominated literature from 1820 to 1865. Poe in his criticism was indebted to Coleridge and either directly or indirectly to the Schlegels of Germany. In his fiction, Poe pursued the Gothic trail to the sublime. Poe in turn became a major influence on the French writers Baudelaire, Mallarme and Paul Valery.
Few writers exist outside of the currents of the times in which they live, and Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne are no exceptions. They are clearly products of their time, which in terms of literature, is called the Romantic Era. The Romantic Movement was one which began in Germany, moved through all of Europe and Russia, and, almost simultaneously, changed the entire course of American literature. Among England’s great Romantic writers are William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and Sir Walter Scott. Romantic writers in America who were contemporaries of Poe and Hawthorne include Herman Melville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Hence, Poe and Hawthorne became key figures in the nineteenth-century flourishing of American letters and literature. Famed twentieth-century literary critic F.O. Matthiessen named this period the American Renaissance. He argued that nineteenth-century writers like Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Poe, Melville and Whitman crafted a distinctly American literature that attempts to escape from the long shadow of the British literary tradition. These writers wrote in a Romantic vein, with a marked emphasis on subjectivity and an interest in scenes of early American life and pristine American landscapes. Yet, most of these writers in different ways also exhibited the darker tones of Romanticism when dealing with American life.

Edgar Allan Poe is perhaps the best-known American Romantic who worked in the so-called Gothic mode. His poems and stories explore the darker side of the Romantic imagination, dealing with the Grotesque, the supernatural, and the horrifying. Poe also rejected the rational and the intellectual in favour of the intuitive and the emotional, a dominant
characteristic of the Romantic Movement. Hence, in his critical theories and through his art, Poe emphasized that didactic and intellectual elements had no place in art. The subject matter of art should rather deal with the emotions, and the greatest art was that which had a direct effect on the emotions.

However, in Poe’s life and works and thus also in “Ligeia” and “Morella”, the stories to be treated in this analysis, love, death and loss, are indissolubly entwined, and serve as the apotheosis of his science and the springboard for his horror. Some critics think that Poe was only a marketer of Gothic horror borrowed from the German models popular during his time. Nevertheless, Poe himself put to rest this assessment when he proclaimed in the preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* that terror is not of Germany but of the soul. Hence, the pertinent issue in Poe becomes the origins for the terror of the soul.

Poe’s brand of Romanticism was akin to his contemporaries but most of his works bordered on what is later called the Gothic genre. The most dominant characteristic of Romantic Movement was the rejection of the rational and intellectual in favor of the intuitive and emotional. In his critical theories and through his art, Poe emphasized that didactic and intellectual elements had no place in art. The subject matter of art should deal with emotions and the great art was that which had a direct effect on emotions. The intellectual and the didactic were for sermons and treatises whereas the emotions were the sole province of art. After all Poe reasoned that man felt and sensed things before he thought about them. Even Poe’s most intellectual characters such as M. Dupin in ‘The Purloined Letter’ and ‘Murders in the Rue Morgue’ rely more on intuition than on rationality. As
one examines M Duplin, one notes that he solves his crimes by intuitively placing himself in the mind of the criminal. Poe’s characters are usually dominated by their emotions. This concept explains much of the seemingly erratic behavior of the characters. Roderick Usher’s emotions are overwrought; Legeia and the narrator of that story both exist in the world of emotion; the behavior of the narrators of ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ and ‘The Black Cat’ are not rational. In ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ the hatred of Montresor exceeds all rational explanations. Throughout Poe’s fiction, much of the behavior of his must be viewed and can be explained best in term of the Romantic period in which he wrote.

Usually in a romantic story the setting is in some obscure or unknown place or else it is set at some distant time in the past. The purpose for this is so that his readers would be diverted by references to contemporary ideas. Poe created new worlds so that his readers would concentrate wholly on the themes or atmosphere. He believed that the highest art existed in a realm that was different from this world. And in order to create this realm, vagueness and indefiniteness were necessary to alienate the reader from the everyday world and to thrust him toward the ideal and the beautiful. Thus, Poe’s stories are set either in some unknown place, such as in ‘The Fall of the House of Usher,’ or else they are set in some romantic castle on the Rhine, or in an abbey in some remote part of England as in ‘Legeia,’ or else they are set during the period of the Spanish Inquisition as in ‘The Pit and the Pendulum.’ Poe’s reader will not find a story which is set in some recognizable place in the present time. His detective fiction is set in France rather than in America.
Poe’s characters are not named usually. They are given only a semblance of recognition. This is more like the Theatre of the Absurd in the 20th century. The narrator in ‘Ligeia’ does not even know the Lady Ligeia’s last name or that of her family. With the exception of a story like ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ where the narrator is addressed by another character, or a story like ‘William Wilson’ where the title identifies the pseudonym of the narrator we usually do not know the name of the narrators of the other stories.

‘Ligeia’ is Poe’s most successful attempt to merge the Gothic grotesque with the traditional love story, elements also combined in ‘Berenice’ and ‘Morella.’ Ligeia gives the story its name and every detail of the plot draws its purpose from her character because she is the object of the narrator’s love. Ligeia perseveres in spite of the obstacles. Ligeia dies, but her memory remains the primary fixation of the narrator’s mind.

Poe contrasts light and darkness to symbolize the conflict of two philosophical traditions. Ligeia emerges mysteriously from the Rhine, a river in southwest Germany. Being German she symbolizes the Germanic Romantic tradition closely related to the Gothic that embraces the sensual and the supernatural. Ligeia’s mind is the centre of the irrational and mystical. The cold lady Rowena is an ice queen from the north. She represents rationality. Rowena embodies the austerity and coldness of English empiricism. Rowena suffers from her confinement within a Gothic bridal chamber that is filled with unnatural decorations. The narrator preserves Ligeia’s sensuality and Romanticism’s artificiality in the chamber’s architecture and decorations. Rowena fears the red drops and the gold tapestries because they seem too unreal. Figuratively, Rowena dies
because she is deprived of sunlight and nature. If the grotesque chamber is, in part, responsible for Rowena’s death, then the lady Ligeia can be considered a symbolic accomplice.

Ligeia’s ultimate victory is her return from the dead. Her return confirms that the narrator has lost his powers of rationality. Though some critics emphasize the unreliability of the narrator because of his abuse of opium, Poe is less concerned with the quality of the narrator’s senses than with the power of his visions. This is not to say that Poe undervalues the narrator. Ligeia’s return from the dead is actually physically real or an opium induced delusion, her apparent physical manifestation at the end of the story means that she has become more real for the narrator than a memory.

Many of Poe’s narrators are unreliable because of paranoia and guilt about their own crimes, as in ‘The Black Cat,’ in which the narrator is anxious about the discovery of his murder. In ‘Ligeia,’ the narrator is obsessed with lost love. His love embraces contradictions. For instance, he passionately loves a woman without knowing her last name. But for Poe, these contradictions are symptoms of love. Poe offers the possibility that love brings Ligeia back, if only in the eyes of the narrator. The mysteriousness of Ligeia’s eye spreads symbolically to the narrator’s eyes. If Ligeia conceals vast knowledge behind her eyes, then the narrator somehow inherits her eye’s power to take in unnatural knowledge to see the dead. The difference lies in the narrator’s ability to convey his knowledge to us, allowing us to witness and judge the return of the lady Ligeia. Neither we nor the narrator ever see what was behind Ligeia’s eyes, and their mystery lends them their allure.
While ‘Ligeia’ strives to be a love story, it relies heavily on the sort of Gothic imagery for which Poe became famous. ‘Ligeia’ resembles a criminal story like “The Tell-Tale Heart” with its emphasis on the narrator’s obsession with specific body parts. Eyes are crucial to both stories, and in this tale, Ligeia’s hair takes on the same importance. The Gothic dimensions of this obsession involve the fantasy of reducing a human being to her body parts. The Gothic emphasis on anatomy raises the possibility that aspects of human identity resides the specific body parts, throwing into question the notion of an immortal soul. What survives of Ligeia is not her soul, but the materialized form of her body, conveyed symbolically, in the last scene of the tale, by her dark hair. The story dramatizes the unconscious longings of the narrator to see his lost love again, and it gives these longings the physical shape of Ligeia’s body. The love story then reverses the murder and dismemberment of a horror story like ‘The Tell-Tale Heart.’ Love becomes the ability to receive a dead body.

The relationship between the narrator and Ligeia was ideal; then suddenly without any warning signs, the lady Ligeia grew ill. As a ghostly hue covered her being, she still expressed a strong desire to be alive. As death approached closer she would pour out the overflowing of a heart whose more than passionate devotion amounted to idolatry towards the narrator. At the end, she asked him to read a poem she had written about the ability to conquer life. The poem, which is is central to this story ‘The Haunted Palace’ is set in a theatre where the audience is composed of angels, and the actors are mimes who are controlled by strange formless creatures. Suddenly a phantom appears upon the stage and chases the mimes but ultimately a crawling shape intrudes. At the end we discover that the
poem is entitled ‘Man: The Conqueror Worm.’ Clearly the poem is the key to the lady Ligeia’s obsession with life beyond death; that is since the worm is mankind’s most potent and horrible symbol of death, the poem deals with death in its most dreaded form.

The story takes place, then, at some distant time in some unknown place and concerns characters who have no discernible past. Furthermore, the narrator is typical of many types of romantic heroes in that he desires absolute knowledge. We see a similar situation in the Romantic story of Goethe’s *Faust*. In addition to its being a superlative Gothic horror tale, the story can also be read as a fine example of the use of the drug opium. During the Romantic period, many writers experimented with the hallucinogenic effects of various drugs. Among the famous English romantics who experimented with drugs, there were Thomas De Quincy and Samuel Coleridge. De Quincy wrote *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, and Coleridge often wrote under the influence of opium. Since the narrator is an opium addict then the entire story can be read as a visual and mental result of hallucinogenic drugs. From this point of view all of the effects described in the story could exist only in the mind of the narrator.

Poe’s ‘Eleonora’ is considered as an autobiographical story. At the time of the publication of the story Poe’s wife Virginia had just begun to show signs of illness, though she would not die for another five years. The narrator then is Poe himself living with his young cousin and his aunt. The abrupt ending with the narrator’s new love is somewhat unconvincing. Poe considered the tale ‘not ended so well as it might be.’ Perhaps it is in the vagueness of the reason which will only be revealed in heaven for permission to break his vow. Even so, compared to the endings of other Poe
tales where the dead lover returns from beyond the grave, this is a happy ending, free of antagonism, guilt or resentment. In ‘Morella’ for example the dead wife reincarnates as her own daughter only to die. In ‘Legeia’ the first wife returns from the dead and destroys the narrator’s new love. Ultimately the massage in ‘Eleonora’ is that a man is allowed to wed without guilt after the death of his first love.

The narrator admits madness in the beginning of the story, though he believes it has not been determined if madness is actually the loftiest form of intelligence. This may be meant facetiously but it may explain the excessively paradise like description of valley and how it changes with their love and later with Eleonora’s death. His admission of madness however excuses him from introducing such fantastic elements. Eleonora however was sick ‘made perfect in loveliness only to die.’ She does not fear death, but fears that the narrator will leave the valley after her death and transfer his love to someone else. The narrator emotionally vows to her with “The Mighty Ruler of the Universe” as his witness, to never bind himself in marriage to any daughter on Earth.

After Eleonora’s death, however the valley of the Many Colored Grass begins to lose its luster and warmth. The narrator chooses to leave to an unnamed strange city. There he meets a woman named Ermengarde and without guilt, marries her. Eleonora visits the narrator from beyond the grave and grants her blessings to the couple. ‘Thou art absolved,’ she says, ‘for reasons which shall be made known to thee in Heaven.’
4.4 POE’S GOTHIC HUMOR:

In the eyes of the common reader the chief success of Poe as a writer of tales rests on his ‘Gothic’ and ‘Ratiocinative’ tales. Poe’s grotesque stories have suffered ever since the Gothic so implanted in the mind of the reading public that they think Poe incapable of humor. This is the basic assumption which Joseph Wood Krutch makes in his assessment of Poe’s humor. He writes, “Poe tried often being humorous because he had not one trace of humor in his make up and fancied that it consisted in mere mechanical facetiousness. He would begin drearily enough and then in spite of himself he would veer round to the subjects, which alone interested him, and his comic tale degenerated into a jauntily delivered list of horrors. Humor was an integral part of Poe’s makeup.”

During Poe’s lifetime these humorous tales were given many epithets: bizeeereries, satire, grotesque, serio tragic-comic, banter, extravagancies, jokes, humor, quiz and grin. The difficulty is further increased by Poe who used the term ‘Grotesque’ along with ‘Arabesque.’ It seems that at the time when Poe published his Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque these terms were used without much discrimination. The epithets Grotesque and Arabesque will be found to indicate with sufficient precision the prevalent tenor of the tales. Poe’s use of the term ‘Grotesque’ in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ might be a clue to the understanding of the term as used by him. Speaking about ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue,’ Duplin says that it is ‘a grotesquerie’ in horror absolutely alien from humanity. The discrepancy between the natural appearance and narrated experience is the basis of the grotesque effects in the tales.
The stores Poe wrote in his early creative period could not be published as “Tales of the Folio Club.” So he contented himself by publishing them in different magazines and journals. Besides earning him bread, these tales gave him an opportunity to play the sedulous ape in reverse by burlesquing the popular and best selling tales in *Blackwood’s* and other English and American journals. Poe learnt the mannerism of the craft. All this indicates that these tales of Poe were not inspired by any spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings rather they were inspired by precedents. Many times Poe parodied his own Arabesques. ‘King Pest’ parodies ‘The Masque of Red Death;’ ‘The Premature Burial’ parodies ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ and ‘Some Words with a Mummy’ parodies ‘Missilery Revelation.’ Among all the grotesque tales of Poe the most prominent are those in which he laughs at the genre.

Poe’s humor has evoked a diversity of critical opinion. His laughter dismissed as hysterical, his tale invoking not the comic muse, but the macabre. So Arthur Ransome says that “his attempts to be funny are like hangman’s jokes.” Constance Rourke adds: “Poe’s laughter was of a single order: it was inhuman and mixed with hysteria.” Rourke relates Poe to the more callous aspects of Southwestern comic mode. Poe’s early tales deal with American life and character. The later work deals with the humorous, with the Gothic producing what Poe himself calls the grotesque effects. It is in this type of writing that Poe’s humor is somewhat disturbing.

**THE GROTESQUE:**

The term ‘grotesque’ derived from the Italian has been intractable and the attempts of the scholars to define it have not been successful. *La
grottesca and grottesco refer Grotta (cave) and designate a certain ornamental style which came to light in the 15th century during the excavations in Rome. This style constituted an unknown ancient form of ornamental painting. To the renaissance, the word grottesco meant a specific ornamental style suggested by antiquity. In such a world the inanimate world and those of plants, animals and human beings become indistinguishable.

The grotesque of the kind present in Poe’s stories like ‘King Pest’ and ‘The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether’ can be traced through the works of Bertolt Brecht, Genet, Ionesco and other members of the Theatre of the Absurd. Karl S. Guthuke thinks this as the theatre of the ‘grotesque-absurd.’ He thinks the grotesque is by and large the outward appearance of the absurd that is to say the disorienting perception of the absurdity of the world expressed itself in the modern ‘theatre of the absurd’ by means of distortion of reality which is grotesque. Thus in the new drama, horror and ludicrous are mingled and it envisions an absurdity, usually of comic dimensions. William O’Connor observes: “The grotesque, as a genre or form of modern literature, simultaneously confronts the anti-poetic and the ugly and presents them, when viewed out of the side of the eye, as the closest we can come to the sublime. The grotesque affronts our sense of established order and satisfies, or partly satisfies, our need for at least a tentative, a more flexible ordering.”

This ‘affronting’ of our sense of established order is felt when one goes through tales like ‘Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether’ and ‘King Pest.’ Wolfgang Kayser maintains that the grotesque is an artistic expression of the sense of alienation that grips man when faith in a natural order is destroyed. He identifies the term with the Gothic. Poe uses the “grotesque” in the sense
that it was used by Sir Walter Scott and that in ‘The Masque of Red Death,’ Poe gives an authoritative definition of the term:

Be sure they were grotesque. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm- much of what has been since seen in “Hernani.” There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There were much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers were stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams and these- the dreams- writhed in and about taking hue from the rooms and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. 48

Poe is commenting on the absurd incident of the character Prince Prospero and his companions trying to avoid death but getting trapped in the very chambers of death. The incident brings together the actual and the imagined states of the characters. While we have to give the due allowance to ironic comments like this on the part of the author, even in an otherwise serious tale, the serious and the grotesque cannot totally be identified, The Gothic tale as a whole cannot be treated as an ironic presentation. G.R. Thomson too goes contrary to Poe’s own opinion in thinking that the grotesque and arabesque refer to a single psychological effect. Donald Ross says, “a major function of the grotesque even in its superficial aspects is to mock dualistic concerns, to disparage all polarities by encompassing them in a larger framework.” 49 It is true that the grotesque, like the Gothic, is very
much a part of the human experience. Poe’s own concern as a writer is to present these facets of man’s life in the world.

In talking of ludicrous heightened into the grotesque or the witty exaggerated into the burlesque, Poe means something different from the fearful colored into the horrible. The grotesque is closer to the comic than to the horrible. The essence of the grotesque lies in a combination of the most sublime and most utterly contemptible and common place of earth. This can be taken as almost Poe’s conception of the grotesque with its basic dualistic concerns, a combination of the high and low. The quality of such a dualistic has been evident in the passage from Poe’s story ‘The Mask of Red Death,’ just quoted above.

‘King Pest’ is burlesquing of Disraeli’s Vivian Grey. It is a specific and obvious burlesque of Disraeli’s scene. Poe lifts the scene as well as the language out of the Vivian Gray so that no room is left about his intention of burlesquing Disraeli. The story deals with two young seamen who bolt away from an ale house “Jolly Tar” leaving their bill unpaid. Hotly pursued by the landlady they reach a district which is infested with plague. Soon they enter a room where six people are sitting on coffin tressels around a table. In Disraeli’s book, Vivian Gray and his servant enter a room where eight very singular looking persons were sitting around a table. The six persons whom the two seamen confront have monstrous exaggeration of features. King Pest’s forehead is “so unusually and hideously lofty as to have appearance of a bouquet at crown of flesh superadded upon the natural head.”50 The mouth of Queen Pest commenced “at the right ear is swept with a terrific chasm to the left- the short pendants which she wore in either auricle continually bobbling into the aperture.”51 The nose of arch duchess Ana Pest, that was
“extremely long, thin, sinous, flexible and pimpled, hung down far below her underlip and in spite of the delicate manner in which she now and then moved it to be one side or other with her tongue, gave to her countenance a somewhat equivocal expression.”

Duke Pest Ilential had a pair of prodigious ears which towered away into the atmosphere of the apartment. The checks of duke Pest Iferous ‘reposed upon the shoulders of their owner like two huge bladders of Oporto wine.’ Duke Pest’s peculiarity consisted in a pair of huge goggle eyes.

However, the tale acquires an independent interest in its description, character and incident, wherein Poe establishes a clear tone of the grotesque. Human traits are distorted to the extent that Legs and Huge Tarpaulin and the six courtiers of King Pest are presented with grotesque exaggeration. The incidents despite the description of the pestilence are burlesque. But their burlesque nature is overwhelming subordinated to the power of description of the pestilence which forebodes terror. According to Constance Rourke the tale “is one of the most brilliant pure burlesque in the language, transmuting terror into gross comedy, as it had often been transmuted in the Western tall tales.”

Despite the author’s attempt at such a ‘transmutation,’ the terrible is always visible behind the comic and this is what makes the effect of the tale ultimately grotesque.

However, Poe’s humor has about it a strong touch of barbarity. Such are the descriptions of the plague district and the ghostly characters of the court of King Pest. Grotesque is nowhere so clearly brought out as in the comic dialogue that ensures between Legs and Tarpaulin and King Pest and above all in the fantastic finale itself. Poe himself calls ‘King Pest,’ a tale containing an allegory. Poe must have been satirizing something in the tale.
‘The gods do bear and will allow in kings, the things which they abhor in rascals’ might be the key to the allegory. Poe might have been thinking mainly of rulers in general in presenting the grotesque distortions of the characters of King Pest and his court. But even then no precise equation between character and its allegorical significance would seem to fit the details. Whatever Poe’s intention might have been in ‘King Pest,’ it would seem more likely that in it he was writing something that is grotesque just for the sake of being grotesque. Poe uses the setting of the story for humorous purpose. The setting akin to that of a horror tale is exaggerated so much that it becomes comic. The use of the grave imagery, coffin, shrouds and wrapping etc. however gives the comic a grim character.

‘The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether’ deals with the experience of the narrator at a private mad house ‘Maison de Sante.’ Poe allowed complete freedom of action to the lunatics. The system treated the lunatics as almost normal men. We find satire in another edge also. William Whipple argues that in this tale, Poe’s satire is at two levels: 1. on the management of mental hospital. 2. on the narrator himself.\(^54\) While the element of satire is present in the tale, what makes it interesting is the grotesquerie of character and incident. Bram Weber is correct when he says that the tale illustrates “how persistently and even sensibly Poe insisted upon the necessity for laughter even in chambers of horror.”\(^55\) Once again Poe burlesques the Gothic conventions. As soon as the narrator and his companion have the main road they are in an essentially Gothic country. Passing through a dark and gloomy forest they stand before the building which housed the mad house. This building was “a fantastic chateau much dilapidated and scarcely tenantable through age and neglect.”\(^56\) The
burlesque scene is the chief source of the humor. The table is loaded with
great delicacies, but to the narrator these seem barbaric. The conversation is
the greatest delicacy. Amusing stories about lunatics are told. One lunatic
fancied himself to be a tea pot, another a donkey, yet another thought
himself cheese and requested his friends to have a taste of it. Somebody
thought of himself a bottle of champagne. A frog, a pumpkin and a punch of
snuff are nearby. If a two headed person exists there present is a person for
whom wearing clothes means getting out of them. The antics that these
lunatics perform provide humor. What does not dawn on the narrator has
been understood by the reader that he is enjoying a banquet in the company
of lunatics. What appear to the narrator to be chimpanzees, ourang-outangs
or big black baboons of the Cape of Good Hope are really the overseers who
have been tarred and feathered by the lunatics.

Arthur H. Quinn thinks that ‘The System of Tarr and Prof. Fether’ is
clever but not important. George E. Woodberry calls it an ‘absurd madhouse
grotesque.’ But T.O. Mabbott calls it “one of Poe’s best humorous pieces.”

‘The Angel of the Odd’ is a similar kind of story. Poe might have some
ideas of the reformists when he started to write this tale. Unbelievable
accidents happen to the narrator who after reading many books ‘felt a little
stupid.’ In an effort to arouse himself he reads the newspaper but again
cannot understand anything. Suddenly he reads the news of a young man
who was playing at puff. Suddenly there appears in the room of the narrator
an old angel composed of containers of alcohol having a false Falstaffian air.
The angel tells him that “he was the genius who presided over the
contretemps of mankind, and whose business it was to bring about the odd
accidents which continually astonish the skeptic.”
The narrator attempts to renew fortune when an advantageous marriage fails. Then he decides to commit suicide as soon as he throws himself into water. A ‘brandy-saturated’ corn flies away with his trousers. He runs after it and soon finds himself falling down a precipice. An angel saves him. It asks to put his broken right hand into his left hand breeche’s pocket certainly the oddest of command from the angel and finding him not obeying it, it cuts the rope and the narrator falls upon his drawing room hearth. The tale is an obvious burlesque on the loose narrative. Poe was a conscious artist for whom verisimilitude and unity in a tale were of supreme importance. He successfully laughs at the failure of the writers who could not construct a close knit tale.

Poe called ‘The Angel of the Odd’ an extravaganza. The tale provides additional evidence of Poe’s well-known dislike for the spirit of social reform. The story burlesques the idea of human perfectibility.

‘A Predicament’ purposely written by Poe as an illustration of the type of sensational tale described in ‘The Psyche Zenobia’ is a parody of the Gothic horror tale. The tale reports a personal experience of miss Zenobia, who during a solitary walk through Edinburgh views a Gothic cathedral and at once decides to go to the highest steeple she ascends the cathedral and through an aperture, actually the keyhole of the church dock, tries to look at the magnificent sight of the city. Very soon the minute hand of the church dock is upon her neck. Finding herself in danger of imminent death Miss Zenobia writes: “I prayed for death, and in the agony of the moment could not help repeating those exquisite verse.”
Soon her head falls into the street below. When she offered it the snuff box it made her speech. It compared Miss Zenobia to the hero who in the heat of the combat continued to contest the battle with inextinguishable valor.

‘A Predicament’ is an illustration of the method learnt by Psyche Zenobia from Mr. Blackwood. The tale is in a highly exaggerated style, and it describes the incredible and absurd experiences of the character. The portraits of Diana are five inches in height with her head somewhat bigger than her body and her tail being cut off exceedingly close. The Negro servant is three feet in height and about eighty years of age. This is an extremely interesting comic portrait of a figure that proves a fitting companion for Psyche Zenobia in the course of her incredible misadventures. Psyche Zenobia’s assumption of an abrupt tone of seriousness in the middle of a light hearted talk intensifies the comic effect of the narrative.

Another device used in the tale for comedy is the method of contrast, juxtaposing things lofty and ludicrous. Psyche Zenobia passing beneath the portal of the cathedral and emerging within the vestibule is compared to the immense river, Alfred, passing unscathed, and unwetted, beneath the sea. While Psyche Zenobia is gazing at the spiral staircase that appears to have had no end, an accident occurred of too momentous a nature in a moral and also in a metaphysical point of view, to be passed over without notice. It is the Diana smelling a rat while Psyche Zenobia herself could not do so. We are told that this is like the fact that some persons can smell the sweet and very powerful perfume of the Prussian Isis while others fail to do so. Following the accidental head on collision of Pompey with Psyche Zenobia
on the floor of the belfry, the latter tore out a vast quantity of black and crisp and curling material, and tossed it with disdain. The materials got stuck up among the cordage of the bell and started dangling. The reactions of Psyche Zenobia are significant. The last paragraph takes a grotesque turn. Due to the pressure of the machine on Psyche Zenobia’s neck one of the eyes rolls down from the socket into the gutter, running along the eaves of the main building. In addition to this the eye from the gutter winks and blinks at the character. And finally the very head of Psyche Zenobia is separated from the body and rolls down into the street. These unbelievable incidents give a more serious turn to the story. The dialogue between the headless character and her head is the culmination of this fantastic series of events. Thus the tale ends as the highly incredible grotesquerie of the type seen in ‘King Pest.’

The story ‘Bon-Bon’ is about a Frenchman and a devil. Bon-Bon is a restaurateur philosophe, to whom we are told Kant himself is mainly responsible for his metaphysics. In the earlier part of the story, humor is provided by the intermixing of the kitchen and the bookshelf:

A dish of polemics stood peacefully upon the dresser. There lay an ovenful of the latest ethics—there a kettle of duodecimo mélanges. Volumes of German morality were hand in glove with a gridiron; a toasting fork might be discovered by the side of Eusebius; Plato reclined at his ease in the frying pan; and contemporary manuscripts were filled away upon the spit.60

In the story a devil visits him and tells him that he has a penchant for the souls of philosophers. He comically tells him about the succulence of
such souls. The irony lies in the fact that the devil with a gourmet’s taste turns down the offer of Bon-Bon to have his soul. The grim humor comes out when we remember that Poe had in mind the contemporary 19th century philosophers and metaphysicians. ‘Bon-Bon’ is a satirical sketch rather than a narrative but it is considerably entertaining. Vincent Buranelli calls it a farce and says: “whether Poe was really capable of writing farces for the stage is debatable. He certainly was capable… of writing farces for the magazines.”61 The dramatic situation serves as a pretext for a series of satirical comments on the pretensions of scholars and philosophers. The piece presents a weird fantasy that achieves effects through exaggeration.

In ‘The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade’ Poe relates the story of the Princes Scheherazade who redeems her kingdom from the ‘depopulation tax upon its beauty,’ by telling the king stories that never finish on the 1002nd night. When she is sure that the King has forgotten his vow she completes the tale only to find herself on the bowstring. The irony of the situation lies in the fact that while the King could believe such oddities as a blue rat and a pink horse with green wings that went by clockwork he could not believe some oddities which were scientifically true. Poe seems to take a dig at the Gothic tales with fantastic happenings which were current in those days. Matter of fact tales went by a discount. The humor of the tale is evident: Scheherazade has to die because for once she tells a tale that has a basis in fact.

‘The Duc De L’Omlette’ is of similar kind. J. R. Hammond demonstrates that Duc embodies N. P. Willis, the editor of the American Monthly Magazine. The setting of the story was certainly suggested by Gabriel Guret, the author of Parnasse Reform whose character Montfluer
makes a speech in Hades. The tale begins with a reference to Keats and L’Andromaque. Keats, it was romantically believed died of harsh criticism of his poem *Hyperion*. The reference to ‘L’Andromaque’ gives out that a spectator might die by seeing a good performance. The irony of the situation is apparent. In comparison to Duc who dies of an ortolan, the fates of the above-named personages become significant.

After three days of his death, Duc appears before the devil who asks to strip. But how can the Prince de Foie-Gras, just come of age, and a member of the academy divest himself of his clothes. The reader laughs at the vanity of Duc. Ordinary mortals, in the presence of the Devil, think about their sins but Duc even vows, ‘I shall take the earliest opportunity of avenging this insult.’ He prepares to go but is checked by a gentleman in waiting. Understanding his situation he looks round the room: “From above hung a chain of an unknown blood-red metal- it’s upper end lost, like the city of Boston, ‘Parni less nues.’” Duc is fainting but a French man never faints out-right.” He offers the devil to fence. Ultimately they play cards. The grotesqueness of the situation lies in the fact that a subject like death is dealt with humorously. The outwitting of the Devil and the Duc’s moving out of Devil’s presence with a flourish makes one laugh.

‘Lionizing’ is obviously a satire on the contemporary practice of puffing up literary reputation by growing eloquent on the imagined literary characteristics. E. H. Davidson says, “‘Lionizing’ however much it may have aimed at satirizing monstrously inflated literary reputation was probably not about the penis. It is also social satire. Just as physical deformities are a source of mirth in a circus the oversize nose of the narrator is displayed to provoke laughter. But it is more than this. It is a satire in the
ways of those people who try to become socially prominent.” The narrator becomes the cynosure of all eyes because of his prominent nose. Next Almacks Elector of Bluddennuff speaks ill of him and he cuts his nose. The real significance of the satire comes out in the speech of the narrator’s father.

‘Mystification’ is the story of a young Barron to whom the study of the science of mystification was the business of his life. This mystification he practiced in well thought manner that even his age becomes a matter of conjecture. The humor of the story lies in the fact that the Baron, a practical joker, was considered incapable of a joke. The story is so well contrived that the Baron can turn it at any time in his favor. He makes the assembly to speak about duel and dueling and leads Herman to speak “I would say, sir, that your opinions are not the opinions to be expected from a gentleman.” To which the Baron replies by hurling a decanter full of wine against the mirror in which the image of Herman was reflected. He is too much of a gentleman to physically insult him, Herman being his guest. The party disperses and the Baron sends the narrator to mediate between the two. Herman through the narrator asks the reason for his behavior or in case he did not reply, prepare for a duel. The Baron sends an explanation which quite satisfies the man. He requests Herman to go through the 9th paragraph of some chapter in an obscure book on dueling. The humor becomes grotesque when we are reminded that the treatise in question was thrown before Herman two or three weeks before the incident, by the Baron intentionally and the former thought it to be a work of unusual merit.

The story ‘Four Beast in One: The Homo-Camelopard’ is set in the most grotesque habitation of man. The narrator and his companion on
reaching the city Antioch find a procession of ridiculous beings, half naked with their faces painted shouting and gesticulating to the rabble. These beings are of many types. The grotesque effect of the tale lies in the fact that the distinction between man and animal has disappeared in the city of Antioch. The king is dressed up as gigantic camelopard and all the courtiers are dressed as different animals and beasts. The timid animals are led with a rope in the procession, while the fierce beasts, like the lion, the tiger and the leopard, roam about without restrain and attend upon their respective owners in the capacity of valet-chamber. But the procession led by the ‘camelopard with the head of a man’ offends the sense of propriety entertained by the rabble by the wild animals domesticated in the city, and a mutiny is the result. The king camelopard runs for life. The courtiers and the concubines leave him in the lurch, and then he approaches the Hippodrome, where his life is safe.

‘Some Words With a Mummy’ is the story of a Mummy’s revivification and its conversation with some pseudo-scientists. It is a political and social satire of great force. The Mummy rebuts all the arguments put forward by these people regarding modern advancement, by reverting to the advances achieved in ancient Egypt. The story starts with a caustic remark on the amount of food eaten by the narrator. His frugal meal consisted of four pounds of Welsh rabbit and five bottles of broom stout. Next, the narrator finds himself in the company of his friends who are about to dissect a mummy. Instead they apply electricity to the mummy and it revivifies. The first act of the revivified Mummy is highly comic. Next the mummy turns and dresses. The dressing provokes laughter. He was dressed with a black coat, a pair of sky blue plaid pantaloons with straps, a pink
gingham chemise, a flapped vest of brocade, a white sack overcoat, a walking cane with a hook, a hat with no brim, patent leather boots, straw colored kid gloves, an eye glass, a pair of whiskers and a waterfall cravat. Then there is an animated discourse. The mummy rebuts all the arguments put forward by the assembly regarding progress in different fields and makes them look ridiculous in their own eyes. First they praise the technological and scientific advances made by the modern man and especially by the Yankees (the Americans of the New England). Regarding phrenology and animal magnetism which the company praises the count relates some anecdote. Finally the company talks about modern progress in the field of politics. Poe obviously digs at the tendency of politicians at bragging.

**THE BURLESQUE AND PARODY:**

According to Joseph Shipley, “the term ‘burlesque’ originally denoted ‘a robust spirit of humor rather than a literary method. Synonymous with ‘droll,’ it implied the strongly ludicrous. Burlesque is now used for poetry, fiction and drama in which customs, institutions, persons or literary works—individual or types—are made to appear ridiculous by incongruous imitation.”

The comic effect is produced by a deliberate disproportion between the style and the sentiments. Frequently its purpose is critical or satirical but it may aim to amuse by extravagant incongruity. Such a purely fantastic piece is called an extravaganza. According to Richmond P. Bond, “Burlesque consists in the use or imitation of serious manner made amusing by the creation of a congruity between style and subject.”

Associated with the burlesque as a form of literary satire is the parody. A mock heroic parody takes a theme full of grandeur and feigned solemnity.
A burlesque treats its subject with ridicule, vulgarity, distortion and contempt.

‘Loss of Breath’ deals with horror effects. In ‘Loss of Breath’ all sorts of improbable situations are credited to exploit them for satiric effect. The humor of the situation lies in the contrast. At the very beginning a trivial subject is treated in heroic language. Here Poe’s humor, like that of Dickens’s, depends on exaggeration and overstatement.

In the Gothic sentimental tales the hero undergoes every kind of torture. He is lost in caves, encounters fetal beasts, suffers the worst calamities, even suffers the nightmarish torture of the inquisition and yet miraculously survives. The sufferings of Mr.Lacko, the protagonist are greater than these. He suffers in breathing. He sees ears as if made part of his intestines and part of his nose. He is hanged and prematurely buried. Yet he cannot die as he has not breathed his last. Finally he finds his lost breath in the body of his neighbor and all formalities of receipt of respiration are gone through. It is a comic episode and happy ending. It is the story of a newly married man suddenly seem with sexual impotence and excluded from life. It reveals under the disguise of a farce a secret wound from which Poe suffered all his life.

It is a parody of the absurd and sensational writing. There is exaggeration in the rendition of both incident and tone. The circumstances of the narrative from the beginning right upto the conclusion are improbable and absurd. The circumstances of Mr.Lackobreath’s loss of breath and its accidental appropriation and the series of adventures that Lockbreath goes
through including his mutilation and hanging – are all manifestly absurd happenings.

In ‘The Devil in the Belfry’ the basis of the grotesque humor lies in the excessive uniformity in the appearance and movements of the people of Vondervotteimittiss. Even the houses and their surroundings are alike to monotony. All the houses in the village have their backs to the hills and the centre of the plain is exactly sixty yards away from the front door of each house. All the houses have an identical look, being made of the same little bricks with black ends. Even the cornices, windows and the woodworks are all alike. This similarity is all pervading. Even the insides of the house are awfully similar. According to George Woodberry it is a ‘grotesque sketch.’ However T. O. Mabbott calls it one of the better grotesques, “a bit of harmless buffoonery, unmarred by repulsive elements.”

The woman depicted in the story, is a little fat and old with blue eyes and red face and she wears a huge cap ornamented with purple and yellow ribbon. Each lady has a Dutch watch in her hand. In every house there are three boys all two feet tall and all wear three cornered cocked hats, purple waist coat reaching down to their thighs, buckskin knee breeches, red woolen stockings, heavy shoes with big silver buckles and long sort outcoat with large buttons of mother of pearl. Each too has a pipe in his mouth and little dummy watch in his right hand. In every house, there is an old gentleman with big circular eyes and huge double chin. Except for bigger cigars and watches in the pockets, these old gentlemen look like the boys. This uniformity of dwellings and the people at large gives the idea of time. It seems that in this village death does not occur and life does not grow. The resolutions passed by the Town Council reflect the attitude of ‘No Change.’
This uniformity evokes grotesque. Poe succeeds in creating a brilliant caricature of the people and life of the small town, and the last scene of the story in which the clock strikes thirteen is highly comic.

‘Never Bet the Devil Your Head’ is the story of a young man Tommy Dammit who is in the habit of offering his head to the Devil that he can do this or that. This habit of betting developed early in his life. He was a vicious person in whom the precocity to do evil was great. At his five months age Tommy used to get into such passion that he was unable to articulate. Next he caught him gnawing at a pack of card. It is unlikely that a child could do it all. Hence there is sufficient evidence to prove that Tommy is a dog. One day when Tomy and the narrator are strolling they are visited by the Devil who wins Tommy’s head. There is a satire against the transcendentalists in the tale and it is presented by the narrator so convincingly that nobody is likely to miss it.

This queer habit of Tommy is called mystical by Coleridge, ‘pantheistical’ by Kant, ‘twistical’ by Carlyle, and ‘hyperquizzitistical’ by Emerson. There the narrator tries to awaken the transcendentalists to their situation. Just before Tommy’s water is accepted by the Devil, he is in an unusual good humor. The narrator rationalizes on his good humor. It is a literary satire on the demand of the critics that every fiction should have a moral. In the sub-title Poe calls the piece ‘A Tale with a Moral.’

Poe intends the tale as a direct reply to his critics who complained that he had never written a tale with a moral. He seems to tell them that if one were to write a fully moral tale it might only be such an absurd thing as the story of Tomm Dammit. The story of Toby offered by Poe might thus be a
parody of a tale with a moral. But while this is the main focus of the satire, Poe uses the opportunity to have a dig at the persons, systems and institutions that he disliked. He has an occasional dig at Coleridge, Kant, Carlyle, and Emerson, the transcendentalists, the homoeopathists, and the contemporary journals like *The Dial* and *The North American Quarterly*. Obviously Poe is hitting at those commentators who give a profound meaning to mere extravagancies of imagination.

‘A Tale of Jerusalem’ is actually a parody of the 19th century fiction. It was very prolix and long drawn out.

**SOCIAL COMEDY:**

While tales of the grotesque like ‘King Pest’ and ‘The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether’ take the reader to the verge of the terrible, in tales like ‘The Spectacles,’ ‘Three Sundays in a Week’ and ‘The Man that was Used Up,’ Poe creates the world of social comedy. These lighter tales should convince us that Poe’s comic sense has several interesting strands in it and that he is really capable of depicting fun for the sake of fun.

Both ‘The Spectacles’ and ‘Three Sundays in a Week’ are tales in a light hearted vein. They, of course, lack the power of expression and the spirited quality of the grotesque tales. ‘The Spectacles’ is a satire on romantic love at first sight presented through the character of the young man who in the blindness of his passion, falls in love with an eighty year old hag who finally turns out to be his own great grandmother. The central idea of the tale is that of mistaken identity. The situation turns upon a rather preposterous comic intrigue between the old lady and a friend of the young man, who together conspire to feed his passion with the intension of fooling
him. The success of the story lies in tricking the reader. In fact the truth of
the story is known from the beginning only to the lady herself and to the
narrator’s friend. Throughout the course of the events the reader feels that he
is reading a romantic story of love. The author cleverly manages the events
of the tale, like the happening in the opera house, the correspondence of the
youth with the lady, and the final experience of the character. The young
man is unsuspecting even when the lady speaks of age. He is under the
impression that she is only a few years older than himself. Even the
miniature that the lady presents to him fails to make him realize the truth.
The reason for all these happenings is the defective vision of the young man.
When on wearing the spectacles he realizes that he has after all been flirting
with an old hag, it is a shocking experience for him. At this point, the whole
plot of the great grandmother and the narrator’s friend is explained. T. O.
Mabbott thinks, ‘Three Sundays in a Week’ is Poe’s only tale possibly to be
read as a simple happy love story. Probably because of its superficial
comedy- reminiscent of ‘Lionizing’- it has been more popular with ordinary
readers. The story turns upon a clever trick played by a young grand nephew
in collusion with a young lady and his naval friends to win his grand uncle’s
consent for his marriage. But the tale is a rather thin affair, and though it
provides an interesting comic portrait of the grand uncle the older characters
are not drawn vividly.

In both ‘The Spectacles’ and ‘Three Sundays in a Week’ there is a
highly exaggerated humor turning on fantastic names and phrases. The
narrator in ‘The Spectacles’ traces his descent to the “Moissart, Voissart,
Croissari, Froissart’ line and the grand uncle Rumgudgeon in ‘Three
Sundays in a Week’ is a ‘hard hearted, dumder-headed, obstinate, rusty,
crusty, musty, fusty, old savage.\textsuperscript{68} The humor arises here from the author’s play of words. The narrator calls his grand uncle Rumgudgeon “a little pursy, pompous, passionate, semicircular somebody, with a red nose a thick skull, a long purse, and a strong sense of his own consequences.”\textsuperscript{69} The ultimate comedy results from the narrator’s attempts to get the consent of Rumgudgeon to marry Kate.

‘The Man That Was Used Up’ adopted a cheap method of vaudeville gag and slapstick and reference to contemporary personage that can explain the popularity of the tale. Arthur Quinn says, “There may be some profound meaning in this satire upon a general who is made up of cork legs, false teeth and other artificial limbs but it escapes the present writer.”\textsuperscript{70} Walter F. Taylor, while admitting that Poe apart from any satirical purposes, “could construct situations that are themselves intrinsically humorous, dismisses ‘The Man that was Used Up’ as merely a dressing up of the old joke about the person with the false teeth, the cork leg and the glass eye.”\textsuperscript{71} But a close reading convinces us of the intrinsic humor of the character and situation. According to Henri Bergson, “The attitude, gesture and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine.”\textsuperscript{72} In the Bergsonian sense the dressed up man in Poe’s tale produces laughter although it has escaped the attention of critics like A H. Quinn and Walter F. Taylor. T.O. Mabbott, however, sees an important thoughtful element in the tale. As he puts it, “The author asks the ancient question what is man? …And considers the problem of identity. The body may be diminished, the spirit is still whole.”\textsuperscript{73}

So the confusion between appearance and reality is the source of the satire here. At the end the narrator visits the general in his bed chamber. He
is frightened to see the scene before him. The General, instead of being the remarkable man of his imagining, turns out to be something grotesque. The conversation expresses the confusion between appearance and reality, and it operates the grotesque humor, and the grotesque borders on the horrible. The conception of ‘The Man that was Used Up’ is comic in its unbelievable distortion; and the tone of the narrative is one of exaggeration.

THE HOAX:

In addition to the grotesque, burlesques, parodies and social comedies, Poe has written a few scientific hoaxes that greatly influenced writers like Jules Verne. In these hoaxes combining realism and fantasy, he creates a fascinating world of make-believe. The effect wrought by these tales on the reader is ultimately one of wonder.

Referring to Poe’s involvement with matters of contemporary interest like exploration, treasure-hunting, and balloons, Constance Rourke says, “Poe turned to comedy; as by instinct he turned to the hoax.” Hervey Allen refers to Poe’s childish and almost unbalanced delight in a hoax of any kind.” However there is something more than childish and the unbalanced in Poe’s hoax. It is a conscious attempt on his part to skillfully and intentionally hoodwink his readers. It is a part of the very dramatic nature of his presentation. Daniel Hoffman referring to Poe’s stories like ‘Hans Pfaall,’ calls him ‘Hoaxiepoe’ and concludes that in ‘Hans Pfaall’ the sub sensibilities of Hoaxiepoe vibrate to the same terrors as do the tales of horror hunted Edgar. Hoffman’s whimsical description does not, however, convince us. Poe’s hoax has a unique place in his comic imagination. G.R. Thompson views the hoax in the light of irony in which the writer mocks
perceptive ‘eirons’ like himself. Poe of course enjoys writing hoaxes but he has obviously thought of the ‘supreme irony’ hidden in these wittings. The method of verisimilitude employed in Poe’s tales is an aspect of his scheme of comic fiction. Poe’s hoaxes are intended to deceive the reader by means of verisimilitude.

‘The Balloon-Hoax’ is one of the science fiction stories which was written with so much of exactitude and verisimilitude that the contemporaries were taken in by the stunt, and considered it nothing less than a reporting of fact. This story follows a highly convincing account of a guided and powered balloon flight across the Atlantic Ocean. The physical facts like the spring driven air crew and the use of drag ropes to control altitude, make the journey highly plausible. There is little surprise if the readers of the New York Sun considered the story authentic. The tale is certainly one of the most entertaining adventure stories. His introduction describes the theme of the piece which is in the form of a journal account of a voyage of Mr. Monck Mason and friends across the Atlantic in three days: “Astounding news by express, via Norfolk! The Atlantic crossed in Three Days! Signal Triumph of Mr. Monck Manson’s Flying Machine!”

Poe’s another scientific hoax which made considerable impact on the contemporary reading public is ‘The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall.’ The tale is based on scientific knowledge. It is about gravitation, astronomy, construction of balloons, atmospheric pressure, the topography of moon and many more. Apart from these, there are other indications that the tale is a parody and burlesque on the so called moon journey. The physical appearance and the fantastic costume of Hans Pfaall confirm that he
is a protagonist. Constance Rourke says, the tale has “a close resemblance to the more elaborate and finished tall tales of the West.” It begins thus:

With a heart of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning spear and a horse of air,
To the wilderness I wander.

- Tom O’Bedlam’s song

On 1st April Hans Pfaal started his journey to the moon. He does not come to the earth in the town of Rotterdom. Instead he throws a letter meant for Von Underduck and Prof. Rubades the president and vice president respectively of the State College of Astronomy. This letter incidentally falls at the feet of Von Underduck. As he stops to pick the letter half a dozen bags of ballast fall on his back. The portrait of the Burgomaster is drawn in comically. He rolls over again at least six times. But during these circumvolutions, he omitted no less than half a dozen distinct and furious whiffs from his pipe, to which he intends fast until the day of his decease.

Hans Pfaal, the narrator says that this wandering to the wilderness from Rotterdam by a balloon, finds all Europe ‘in an uproar, all physics in ferment, all reason and astronomy together by the ears.’ The voyage described in greater detail than in “The Baloon Hoax” has about it humor of a high order. Replete with extensive terminology of aerial navigation the tale produces an effect of verisimilitude. In the words of Heavy Allen, the clever and imaginative realism of Poe’s style was
successful in temporarily cozening the multitude who read, gaped and believed.”78

‘Von Kempelen and His Discovery’ is a hoax on the California Gold-Rush. To give verisimilitude Poe uses many strategies. At the very outset he says that his efforts to offer a few remarks on Von Kempelen should not be construed as his design to look at the subject from a scientific point of view. The hoax lies in the possibility of the Gold rush coming to an end once gold chemically prepared is made available in sufficient quantity.

‘The Business Man’ satirizes America for neglecting its poor. In no country, Poe knew it from personal experience, were the poor more despised. The protagonist of the story Peter-Profitt, one after another takes up trades and in all he achieves success. He works as a walking advertiser, an eye sore prig, a salt and batter man, a dabbler of mud, a cur spatter, organ-grinder and a cat crower and in all of these occupations he achieves capital success. In the end Peter-Profitt says, “I consider myself therefore a madman and am bargaining for a country seat on the Hudson.”79 Obviously Poe is satirizing the success formula here.

One of the greatest of Poe’s hoaxes is of course, ‘Diddling Considered as one of the Exact Sciences.’ ‘X’ing a Paragraph’ relates in a humorous way the story of ‘The Cask of Amontillado.’

Another story ‘Mellonta Tauta’ tries to explode all the stupidities of Poe’s time in one sweep. It is like an April Fool’s joke. Pundita is the narrator of the story. ‘Pundit’ in Sanskrit means a learned man. Pundita in this story exposes one after the other the foibles of the age. During Poe’s day, balloon and air travels were a craze.
References:


34. Joseph Shipley, qt by D Ramakrishna, *The Crafts of Poe’s Tales*, p. 82.


46. Constance Rourke, qt by D. Ramakrishna, *Explorations in Poe*, p. 71.

47. William O’ Conner, qt by D. Ramakrishna, *Explorations in Poe*, p. 75.


49. Donald Ross, qt by D. Ramakrishna, *Explorations in Poe*, p. 76.


53. Constance Rourke qt by D. Ramakrishna, *Explorations in Poe*, p. 78.

54. William Whipple qt by D. Ramakrishna, *Explorations in Poe*, p. 79.


64. Edgar Allan Poe, ‘Mystification,’ *Complete Tales and Poems*, p.323.


70. Arthur Quinn, qt by D Ramakrishna, *Explorations in Poe*, p.93.

71. Walter Taylor, qt by D Ramakrishna, *Explorations in Poe*, p.93.


73. T.O. Mabbott, qt by D Ramakrishna, *Explorations in Poe*, p.93.

74. Constace Rourke, qt by D Ramakrishna, *Explorations in Poe*, p.94.

75. Harvey Allan, qt by D Ramakrishna, *Explorations in Poe*, p.94.


78. Harvey Allen, qt by D Ramakrishna, *Explorations in Poe*, p.97.